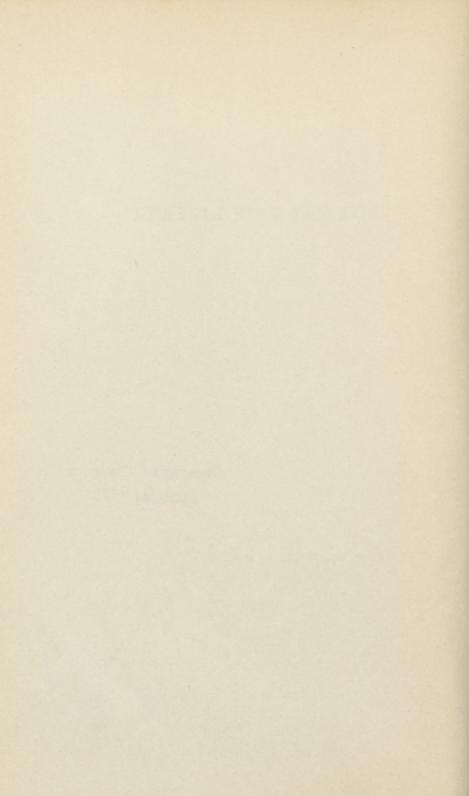
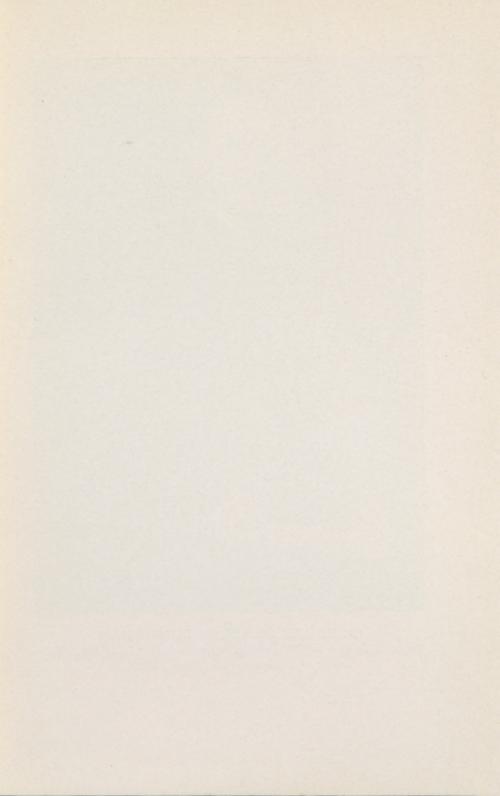
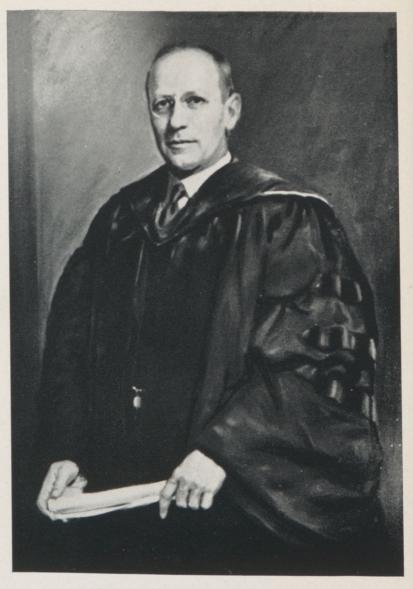


DICKINSON COLLEGE Founded 1773







BOYD LEE SPAHR, DICKINSONIAN
From the original by Wilbur Fiske Noyes in the Boyd Lee Spahr Room for Dickinsoniana, Dickinson College.

# Early Years at Dickinson



# THE BOYD LEE SPAHR LECTURES IN AMERICANA

VOLUME ONE 1947-1950



DICKINSON COLLEGE Carlisle, Pennsylvania

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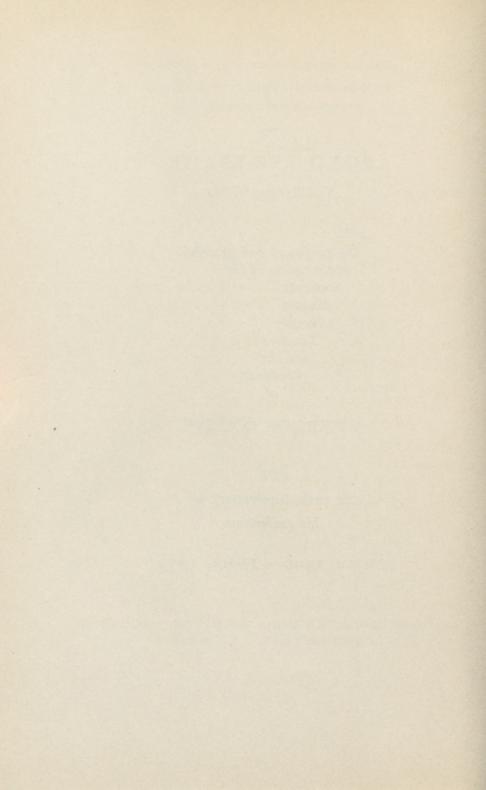
# BOYD LEE SPAHR DICKINSONIAN

with
the profound and grateful
appreciation of the
Students
Alumni
Faculty
Trustees
and the
President
of

#### DICKINSON COLLEGE

ON
the 50th Anniversary of
his graduation

JUNE 1900 - JUNE 1950



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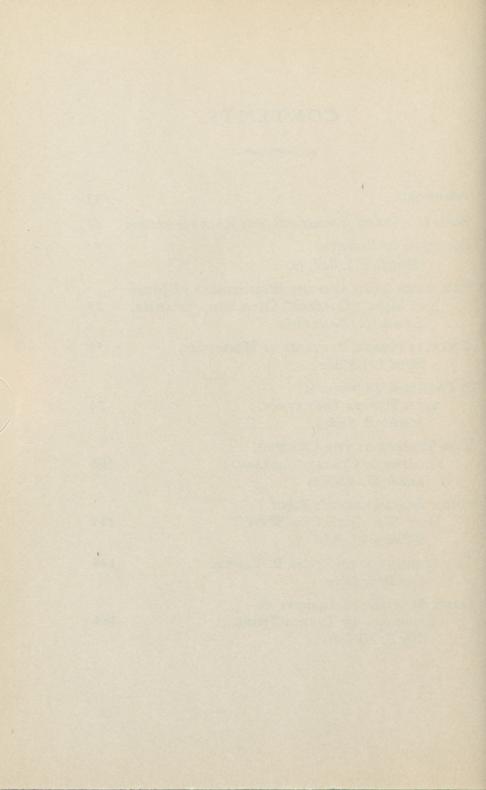
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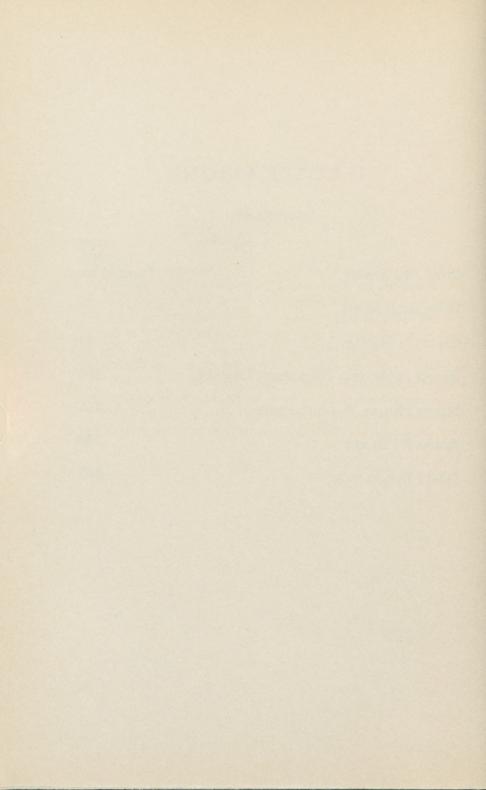
LEADERSHIP IN TRYING TIMES.



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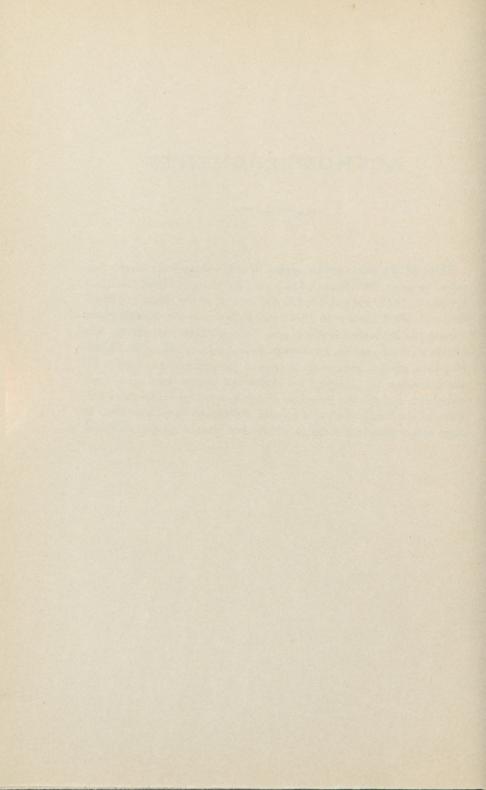
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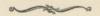
## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Three of the essays which appear in this volume have already appeared in print. Mr. Butterfield's paper, the inaugural Boyd Lee Spahr Lecture in 1947, was published in the Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences in 1948; Mr. Philips' and Mr. Smith's papers appeared in Pennsylvania History in 1947 and 1949 respectively. The editors of these journals, Dr. George Rosen and Dr. Milton W. Hamilton, have granted permission to reprint the articles here. Except for the correction of typographical errors and one or two minor misstatements and for the alteration of the footnotes to make them conform to the standard of this volume, no changes have been made in these essays from the form in which they were originally published.

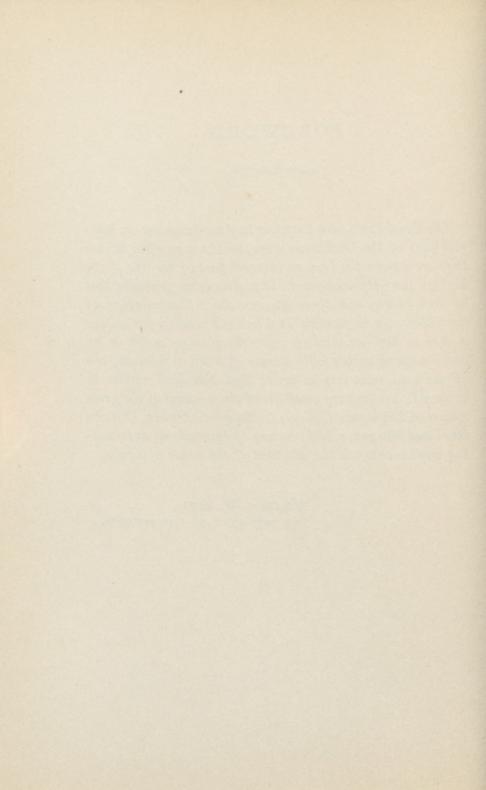


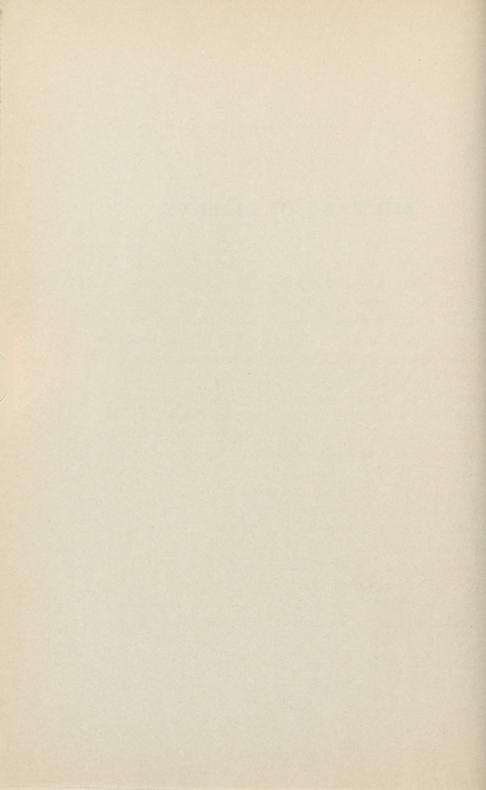
#### FOREWORD



The Boyd Lee Spahr Lectures in Americana are an integral part of the Dickinson scene, as the man after whom they are named has been an integral part of the life of the College for fifty-odd years. It is altogether probable that in the century and three-quarters since the founding of the College no single individual has held steadily for so long a time so high an ideal of what the College ought to be, and has given such a full measure of time, of wisdom, and of material resources in order that this ideal might be achieved. To the very small list of the greatest of the great names of Dickinson College, to Rush and Nisbet, Durbin, Reed and Morgan, a half century of devoted and outstanding service compels the addition of the name of Spahr.

WILLIAM W. EDEL THE PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE.





## BOYD LEE SPAHR, DICKINSONIAN

An Appreciation



THIS volume of essays on the history of Dickinson College has been prepared as a part of the testimony of respect which the College—its trustees, faculty, and alumni—has expressed to Boyd Lee Spahr on the fiftieth anniversary of his graduation from Dickinson. Such a tribute is proper and deserved, for no alumnus has done more for the College; few as much. Mr. Spahr has served the College in every area of its activities, but one field of his special interest has been in collecting and preserving the evidences of Dickinson's history—the books, manuscripts, portraits, and other relics of its past; and it is therefore especially appropriate that he receive on this occasion the dedication of a volume of historical essays.

His entire life as a member of the Dickinson family has in a sense been preparation for this moment. Certainly his career has been all of a piece—the purpose of his youth realized in maturity, the interests of young manhood continued to the present day. As an undergraduate he excelled in literary and forensic activities; today he is an

eminent barrister, truly "learned in the law." History was the subject he enjoyed most in college; today he brings to that avocation a mind so trained and stocked that his reviews in professional journals are ones a professional scholar might be proud to have written. In whatever way he has served the College, he has served it well; and this because his purpose in serving it was always clear, and he had the talent and character to achieve that purpose.

It is easier to list and describe than to comprehend and assess the services Mr. Spahr has performed for Dickinson College. A trustee of the College for more than forty years and President of the Board for nearly twenty, he has maintained a constant and detailed interest in the most intimate affairs of the College. During all this time he has been a regular and generous benefactor of the College; none more so; yet most of his gifts have been so quietly made that few know their number and extent. Today they are well into the middle bracket of six figures. More importantly, from his undergraduate days he has preserved a picture of what Dickinson ought to be, and as much as any man, has worked to bring that vision to reality. This little volume of essays on the history of the College, done in his honor, is one of the ways in which Dickinson tells him what he has meant to the College which has meant so much to him.

Boyd Lee Spahr entered Dickinson in 1896; he was graduated four years later with the most outstanding record of his class. He won the Dare Entrance Prize as a freshman and McDaniel Prizes in both his freshman and sophomore years, and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He was president of the Belles Lettres Literary Society, Chairman of the Junior Prom Committee, an active member of the Y.M.C.A., a champion tennis player, and a member of Raven's Claw. But writing and debating were his principal extra-curricular activities and in the literary society and on the college publications he found opportunities to develop the power to speak and write effectively. He represented his society in the Inter-Society Debate of 1900, supporting the affirmative side of the proposition "That England was justified in her course of action toward the Transvaal Republic previous to the war"; and he was a member of the Dickinson team which defeated Pennsylvania State College in intercollegiate debating competition, which, as editor of *The Dickinsonian*, he had done much to re-establish.

His contributions to the College publications are interesting reflections of the mind which later generations of Dickinsonians were to know at the top of its powers. His first published essay, submitted to *The Dickinsonian* in the middle of his freshman year, on "The Value of Printing to Civilization," argued printing's role as the promoter of learning and liberty. The idea was still in mind three years later when he chose "The Evolution of Liberty" as the subject of his senior forensic oration. As editor of the weekly paper in his senior year he printed an editorial in favor of historical reading. History, he declared, is properly the study of the ideas of which events are merely the expressions. "All the recorded struggles of history," he continued, "represent not merely battles between princes and nations, but the collision of different ideas brought

into hostile contact." Always scrupulous about facts, he would never forget to ask what meanings lay beneath them.

But all this was history writ large; for the more intimate and casual history of his native Cumberland Valley and especially of his historic College Boyd Spahr soon acquired a warm feeling. Evidences of Dickinson's great tradition could be discovered in the musty library, if only a student would search for them; while old grads returning for the week-long commencements of those days could tell an eager youngster tales of the brilliant teachers of Durbin's time and, perhaps, stories they had heard years ago from old men who had actually known Nisbet and Rush and Cooper. The Dickinsonian, after Spahr became one of its editors, began to publish historical articles on the College. Addresses before the students on John Dickinson by Robert H. Richards of the Class of 1895, and on Roger B. Taney by the Honorable Walter George Smith of Philadelphia, were reported at length; and in an enthusiastic editorial the President of the College was called upon to invite a third address to be delivered on Buchanan. When Professor Super told him that he owned the account-book of the first treasurer of the College, Spahr asked permission to print extracts from it. General Horatio C. King, under the pseudonym of "Rex of '58," was induced to tell again in the columns of the paper the farcical tale of the "burial of Mahan."

In the history of the College and from his own student days Spahr found materials for a number of short stories and sketches. These he brought together and published in a small volume a few months after his graduation under the title Dickinson Doings. The book contained several stories, like "How the Sub Won the Game," so typical of College authors of that day they seem almost to parody themselves. But the book is forever memorable for its stories of the College's past. General King's burial of Mahan was rewritten and there was a sketch of Noah Pinkney, "the old provider of your nightly feeds," the genial purveyor to generations of students of Dickinson sandwiches and Dickinson pretzels, "fine as silk, sah, fine as silk!" But the best of the stories, as it must always be, was "The Incarceration of Jesse," the true but still incredible tale of how Moncure Conway had caused President Peck to be locked up in an insane asylum in Virginia. In Boyd Spahr's day this was a story each student generation insisted on having from Dr. Conway's own lips; until he told it to them, they would not gladly listen to his addresses on world peace. In Spahr's version the story of President Peck still delights and amazes new generations of Dickinsonians, as the wellworn copies of Dickinson Doings in the library attest.

From College, after a year as a teacher in the Dickinson Preparatory School, Mr. Spahr went to the University of Pennsylvania Law School. He was graduated in 1904, admitted to the bar, and began to practice in Philadelphia. In time, he became the senior partner of the distinguished law firm of Ballard, Spahr, Andrews and Ingersoll; and he has been chairman of the Board of Governors of the Philadelphia Bar Association.

Meanwhile, in 1908, when he was twenty-eight years old, he was elected a trustee of the College. In the early

Twenties, as his professional work allowed him some leisure, Mr. Spahr began to take an increasingly active part in College affairs. This was the period when Lemuel T. Appold was injecting new life into the Alumni Association and James Henry Morgan was giving new directions to the instruction of the College. Mr. Spahr succeeded Appold as president of the General Alumni Association in 1928; three years later he was elected president of the Board of Trustees.

In this office, as in all his relations with the College, even as an undergraduate editor, Boyd Lee Spahr has been guided by a single determination—to make Dickinson the best possible small liberal arts college. This has never been an easy task: there have been obstacles and accidents and heart-breaking inertia. But the ideal was always there; and again and again, in addresses to the trustees and alumni, in his letters to the Presidents, in all his private conversations, with a hundred variations he has repeated this theme. But he has never been content merely to talk. If a new building were needed to promote his ideal, he would serve as chairman of the fund committee and make the largest contribution; when the librarian wondered how a special collection of books could be purchased within the annual budget, a letter was likely to arrive one morning from Mr. Spahr saying quietly that if the books could not be purchased in any other way, he would be happy to present them as a gift; when the Ten-Year Development Program emphasized the paramount importance of instruction, Mr. Spahr endowed a professorship in history. He has thus set

#### BOYD LEE SPAHR

the tone and pace of the College in its progress toward his —and its—ideal.

In 1945, when President Prettyman became ill, Mr. Spahr unexpectedly found himself chairman of a committee of three to manage the affairs of the College until a new President could be found. From this new position he could see the intricate operation of all of the activities of the College. It was a trying time, the war was not yet over; a few months later the College had suddenly to expand as the veterans swarmed into classes. Without a President the College was ill-prepared to meet the new and sometimes complicated problems of post-war adjustment. No long-range policies could be adopted. In this crisis Mr. Spahr was consulted increasingly on all matters of policy and many matters of detail. If a department head needed an additional assistant, he was as likely to make his need known to Mr. Spahr as to anyone else. Committees which normally kept the President informed of their actions now sent copies of their proceedings to Philadelphia. From time to time Mr. Spahr himself came to Carlisle, where in a single Friday evening and Saturday forenoon he resolved the accumulated problems of weeks. Whatever else may be said about these months, they gave Mr. Spahr an appreciation of the most intimate personal and administrative problems of the academic side of the College. For that understanding the administrative officers and faculty have abundant reason to be grateful.

Meanwhile Mr. Spahr's interest in history, awakened as an undergraduate, continued to grow. He read omnivorously, but specialized in history, especially in the middle period of American history. For the journal of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania he is frequently asked to review scholarly works on the political and legal history of the pre-Civil War period and on the military and political history of the Civil War. His reviews are invariably carefully planned—critical, specific, incisive—indeed the model of what reviews should be. His appointment as counsel of the Historical Society was thus not more a tribute to his legal talents than to his historical knowledge and understanding.

Of the many phases of the College in which he takes an interest the library occupies a prominent place. He was the principal sponsor of his Class' gift of the English Research Room in 1925. He was especially interested in the remodeling of Bosler Hall in 1940. He rarely comes to Carlisle now that he does not visit the library, and usually he leaves there one or two boxes of books which he has acquired for it. But of all aspects of the library's work perhaps none attracts him more than the Dickinsoniana Collection. In this his interest has been deep and unremitting. Here are preserved the jealously guarded volumes remaining of the original College library, the scientific apparatus of Dr. Joseph Priestley, the great collection of papers of Dr. Charles Francis Himes, and a thousand miscellaneous manuscripts relating to the history of the College and its distinguished alumni. Most of these have been presented to the College library by Mr. Spahr.

He cons the catalogues of the booksellers and autograph dealers in Philadelphia and New York; a dealer who knows his interests keeps him informed of desirable items; and hardly a month passes that the library does not receive from him additions to its collection. In 1949 alone there were twenty-two separate gifts. Most of the 150 letters and papers of James Buchanan have been given by Mr. Spahr; many of the letters of Charles Nisbet were his gifts; more recently he has been sending the Dickinsoniana Collection letters of Moncure Conway and William Bingham, an original trustee.

Until 1940 this collection was housed in West College, but was rarely open to either the College community or the public. In that year, with the remodelling of Bosler Hall, a room was provided for the College history collection. The Boyd Lee Spahr Room was the only name to

give it.

In the fall of 1946 the project was formed to call attention to this growing collection of materials on the history of the College, and to exploit them by a series of lectures. One or two members of the faculty had already worked in the collection and Mr. Phillips of the library staff in the summer of 1946 made a careful examination of "the John Dickinson books," as the original library was called. A larger scheme seemed warranted. Accordingly it was decided that there should be one or two lectures each year and that, in recognition of the importance of Dickinson College and its graduates in the larger history of American culture, they should be called "Lectures"-not "on Dickinsoniana," but-"in Americana." Inevitably, Miss May Morris, the librarian, under whose auspices the lectures are held, suggested that the series be named for Mr. Spahr. Mr. Lyman H. Butterfield was invited to deliver the first

lecture, in March 1947. It was, appropriately, on the chief founder and the founding of the College. Since that time the Spahr lectures have come to be one of the most attractive features of the College year.

It is the intention of the College that from time to time the Spahr lectures should be published in book form. It is a happy coincidence that the first volume of lectures can appear at this time and in this form—as a tribute in honor of Boyd Lee Spahr on the fiftieth anniversary of his graduation from Dickinson College.

0

## Whitfield J. Bell, Jr.

BOYD LEE SPAHR PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN HISTORY
DICKINSON COLLEGE

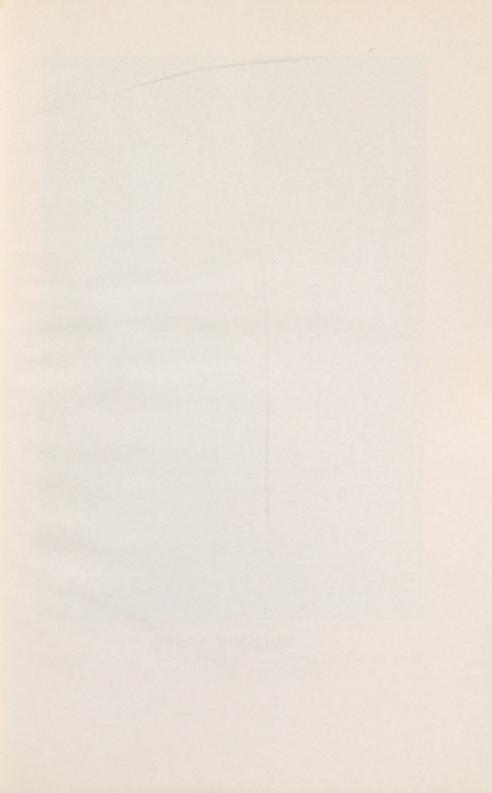
On behalf of the librarian and staff of the Dickinson College Library I welcome you tonight to the inaugural Boyd Lee Spahr Lecture in Americana. This is the first of a series of lectures which we expect will long continue and which we are confident will make a significant contribution to our knowledge of the history of the College and of American culture.

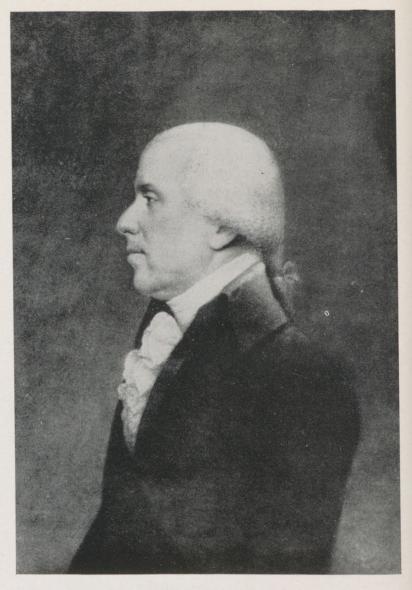
For it was no presumption which induced us to name these "Lectures in Americana." The history of Dickinson College does not begin and end at the campus wall. On the contrary Dickinson is an expression of the cultural life and aspirations of the American community; it has been a fruitful guardian of the intellectual life of the nation. Of this the College seal is a striking illustration—so simple, yet so full of meaning: the open Bible, supporting a telescope, the whole surmounted by a liberty cap, with the motto around it, "Religion and learning the bulwark of liberty." In that seal the whole intellectual climate of the late eight-

<sup>\*</sup> Remarks at the inauguration of the Boyd Lee Spahr Lectures in Americana March 7, 1947.

eenth century is brought to focus; no one can appreciate the original inspiration and purposes of the College unless he knows where Dickinson stood in the pattern of the eighteenth century enlightenment. Similarly the contributions of the College as an institution-I say nothing here of the contributions of its alumni-are intimately related to the life of America. Generally those contributions were good, as when Dr. Nisbet, almost by force of will alone, held this College together for twenty years and sent out a stream of lawyers, teachers, and ministers to bring knowledge and discipline to the western country. Sometimes, to be sure, the College spoke in questionable voice, as when, in 1810, a resolution of its trustees against abolishing the death penalty in this Commonwealth was credited by the supporters of the measure with causing its defeat in the legislature. But, good or bad, the influence of the College in the nation was never negligible.

It was fitting, then, that these lectures be named "Lectures in Americana." It was equally fitting that they be named for Dr. Boyd Lee Spahr. For no alumnus or friend of the College has done more than he to collect and preserve the evidences of the College's history. This Dickinsoniana Room indeed is rich chiefly as Mr. Spahr has filled it with letters, documents, prints, and portraits of Dickinson and Dickinsonians. Mr. Spahr must haunt the bookshops; he must con the booksellers' lists; for hardly a week passes that the library does not receive from him some addition to the materials for its history. Properly—almost inevitably, one might feel—these lectures have been named the Boyd Lee Spahr Lectures.





BENJAMIN RUSH
From the original pastel by James Sharples in the National Museum,
Independence Hall, Philadelphia.

# Benjamin Rush and the Beginnings of "John and Mary's College" Over Susquehanna\*



L. H. Butterfield

ASSISTANT EDITOR,

THE PAPERS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON

Mong those who signed the Declaration of Independence in August 1776, none was more conscious of the full meaning of his action than a newly-elected delegate from Pennsylvania, Dr. Benjamin Rush. He was to spend much of his uncommon energy during the rest of his life in attempts to apply the principles of the Declaration, as he understood them, not merely in government but in medicine, science, letters, social reform, and education. The founding of Dickinson College on the Pennsylvania frontier across the Susquehanna was a part of his program of cultural revolution. In an essay on "The Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," composed soon after the college

"John and Mary's College" was Dr. Rush's original name for Dickinson College.

<sup>\*</sup> The first Boyd Lee Spahr Lecture delivered at Dickinson College on March 7, 1947; originally published in the *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, III (1948) 427-442; and reprinted here with the permission of the editor.

Mr. Butterfield wishes to acknowledge gratefully the aid of a grant by the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia for locating and editing the letters of Dr. Rush. He would gladly receive information about privately owned Rush letters and other manuscripts, including letters written to him.

charter was granted in the fall of 1783, Rush declared that "the business of education has acquired a new complexion by the independence of our country. The form of government we have assumed, has created a new class of duties to every American." 1 The duties were, of course, those of responsible citizenship; and it was Rush's conviction, induced by the peculiar ethnic and political circumstances of the state, that Carlisle was a strategic place in which to begin his experiment in republican education.

Carlisle, a prosperous Scotch-Irish village founded about mid-century, was the focal point of a large area of semifrontier settlements along and beyond the Susquehanna River. The region was passing from the second to the third stage of frontier development as described by Rush in his lively "Account of the Progress of Population, Agriculture, Manners, and Government in Pennsylvania." 2 The second species of settler, says Rush, succeeding the woodsman who moves on when game grows thin, generally acquires three or four hundred acres, clears a part of it for meadow land, improves the rude cabin he finds upon the ground, builds a barn for his stock, plants an orchard, and raises crops of wheat and rve. His farm rarely looks prosperous or tidy. His fences are half made; his cattle are illfed, and if his windows were once glazed, their ruins are soon supplied with old hats or pillows. In Rush's view these deficiencies are not due solely to hardship:

This species of settler is seldom a good member of civil or religious society: with a large portion of a hereditary mechanical kind of re-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical (Philadelphia, 1798) 6. <sup>2</sup> Written in 1785; first printed in the Columbian Magazine, I (1786) 117-122.

ligion, he neglects to contribute sufficiently towards building a church, or maintaining a regular administration of the ordinances of the gospel: he is equally indisposed to support civil government: with high ideas of liberty, he refuses to bear his proportion of the debt contracted by its establishment in our country: he delights chiefly in company—sometimes drinks spirituous liquors to excess—will spend a day or two in every week in attending political meetings; and, thus, he contracts debts which (if he cannot discharge in a depreciated paper currency) compel him to sell his plantation, generally in the course of a few years, to the *third* and last species of settler.<sup>3</sup>

The last is of course the permanent settler, who need not be described here beyond saying that he is "commonly a man of property and good character" and builds himself a stone house and barn. Rush was primarily interested in the second class, which embraced most of the Scotch-Irish settlers in the western counties. He had reasons for being so. On his trip to Carlisle for a meeting of the Board of Trustees in April 1784, he had closely observed them. After his return he wrote the Reverend William Linn of Big Spring, Cumberland County, a member of the Board, that the local clergy ought more frequently and strongly to admonish their flocks on such subjects as fence-mending and whiskey-drinking. If this were done, Rush surmised, fewer farms would be sold to the more industrious Germans, and fewer Presbyterian families would move on to Kentucky or the Ohio.4 To this suggestion Linn replied with the voice of experience:

<sup>\*</sup> Essays, 216-217.

4 Rush to Linn, May 4, 1784, Rush Mss., Library Company of Philadelphia. The Rush Mss. in the Library Company will be cited hereafter simply as Rush Mss. For the sake of clarity the texts of manuscript sources have been in some degree modernized.

The people here have been drinking with all their might whiskey and bad rum all harvest. Though the physician says it will destroy their bodies, and the clergyman it will ruin their souls, they drink on. They will have the Constitution and the bottle at any hazard whatever.5

By "the Constitution" Linn meant the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, regarded by Rush and his associates as the major stumbling-block to progress in Pennsylvania. In a very real sense Dickinson College was founded as an agency of the anti-constitutionalist or "Republican" party. The explanation is complex—as Pennsylvania political struggles are apt to be-and only an outline of it can be given here.6

The Revolution in Pennsylvania was more truly and thoroughly a revolution than in perhaps any other infant state. The Constitution of 1776, born simultaneously with the Declaration of Independence, destroyed not only the power of the British crown but also that of an entrenched aristocracy which was composed principally of English Episcopalians and Quakers. The new democratic leadership was dominantly Scotch-Irish, supported by two classes that had been deliberately denied the franchise by the old Assembly—Philadelphia artisans, and settlers in the western counties. In the early revolutionary movement Dr. Rush was as ardent a rebel as any among this popular party; he had sat in the convention that framed the constitution in the summer of '76, and had been elected a dele-

<sup>5</sup> Linn to Rush, July 20, 1784, Rush Mss.

Thin to Rush, July 20, 1784, Rush Miss.

Two recent studies jointly provide a thorough and reliable account of Pennsylvania party battles during and after the Revolution: J. Paul Selsam, The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 (Philadelphia, 1936), and Robert L. Brunhouse, The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776-1790 (Harrisburg, 1942).

gate to Congress by that convention in July. After a few months' observation of the "leather-apron" government in action, however, his sentiments toward it altered. Like John Dickinson and other conservative friends, Rush feared too much democracy all at once; he lost his seat in Congress early in 1777 because of his open disapproval of the constitution; and a little later he lamented to Anthony Wayne that the radical party had "substituted a mob government to one of the happiest governments in the world." The signer John Morton, he added, "it is said died of grief at the prospect of the misery which he foresaw would be brought upon Pennsylvania by her present form of government." 7 He now threw himself impetuously into the fight to revise the constitution, or, as he more vigorously put it, to rescue Pennsylvania "from the hands of tyrants, fools, and traitors." 8 He wrote pamphlets and newspaper pieces, aided in organizing the Republican, or opposition, party, and resolved to plant a college—as a general would plant an outpost—in the enemy's country.

This is, however, to skip several steps. Rush's opposition did not become violent and embittered until after the reconstruction of the College of Philadelphia in 1779. Under the guidance of its redoubtable Episcopalian provost, the Reverend William Smith, whose conduct in the Revolution was to say the least equivocal, the College of Philadelphia was—or was believed to be—a center of Tory reaction. By an act of 27 November 1779 the Legislature confirmed

8 Rush to John Montgomery, Nov. 5, 1782, Rush Mss.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Rush to Wayne, May 19, June 18, 1777, Wayne Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

its charter but dismissed its trustees and faculty (the faculty being shortly invited to return to their duties), and established it as a state university with an income from confiscated loyalist estates.9 Professor Cheyney has pointed out that the University of the State of Pennsylvania was a bold and valuable educational experiment; 10 but to Rush the act of reconstruction appeared in the light of cheap vengeance, repugnant in all respects but perhaps most in its requiring officers and teachers to swear an oath of loyalty to the revolutionary government of Pennsylvania. He therefore refused to resume his chair as professor of chemistry in the Medical School. His feelings are best expressed by himself in a letter to Dr. Nisbet, the prospective president of Dickinson College, giving a history of parties in revolutionary Pennsylvania. This "history" is a wonderful combination of unassailable facts, shrewd observations, slander, half-truths, and rigged statistics; but it is characteristic of Rush when writing on controversial subjects, and, knowing him, we are prepared for it-as Nisbet, unfortunately, was not.

The letter <sup>11</sup> begins with an interesting exposition of the ethnic makeup of the state. The passive or moderate conduct of the Quakers and Episcopalians in 1776, Rush goes on, "threw our government wholly into the hands" of the several sects of Presbyterians, while the Germans,

who are an uninformed body of the people, submitted to their usurpations and formed a principal part of their strength.

11 Rush to Nisbet, Aug. 24, 1784, Rush Mss.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> A. J. Dallas, Laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, I (1797) 815-821. <sup>10</sup> Edward P. Cheyney, History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940 (Philadelphia, 1940) ch. iv.

Their [the Presbyterians'] first act of power was to impose a Constitution upon the State full of innovations and wholly contrary to the ancient habits of the people. This Constitution was formed by a fanatical schoolmaster <sup>12</sup> who had art enough to sanctify it with Dr. Franklin's name. It consists of a single legislature and a new-invented body of men called a council of censors and of many other new-fangled experiments, absurd in their nature and dangerous to the liberties of the state. By precluding 2/3 of the State from voting by means of the most disgraceful test laws, they have contrived to support their constitution to the present day.

The Republican party, according to Rush's analysis, consists of the "Episcopalians, Quakers, Lutherans, Menonists, and moderate Presbyterians," that is, "in general the ancient inhabitants of the State, . . . distinguished for their wealth, virtue, learning, and liberality of manners." This party formerly controlled the College of Philadelphia.

It was founded by the Episcopalians and supported by them without the least aid from government for twenty-two years. This College with all its funds was seized in the year of 1778, contrary to justice and policy and even contrary to their own Constitution, by the Constitutional party. Dr. Ewing, Geo. Bryan, and Jos. Reed (then president of the State) took the lead in the most nefarious business. Dr. Ewing, as the reward of his activity in this fraululent act, was honored with the provost's chair. £1500 a year was added to the ancient funds of the College by the Assembly. But Heaven has frowned upon the impious act. The College has fallen into general disrepute. Boys of 14 and 15 years of age not half educated

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> James Cannon is meant; he was professor of mathematics in the College of Philadelphia.

are admitted to the honors of the College, and morals and manners are kept out of sight as much as they are at riding or fencing school in Great Britain.

Foreseeing that this act in robbing a college of its charter could not be lasting, and anxious to provide a seminary for better education of our youth, a few gentlemen of our society projected the College at Carlisle in the year 1781. It promised great advantage to the State in that western district. It bid fair to soften the tempers of our turbulent brethren, to inspire them with liberal sentiments in government and religion, to teach them moderation in their conduct to other sects, and to rescue them from the charges of bigotry and persecution that are so often brought against them. It was intended further to reform and civilize our German citizens. too many of whom imagine the whole business of life to consist in labor, and all its happiness in gold and silver and fine plantations. The friends of the College of Philadelphia saw this undertaking with fear and indignation. Dr. Ewing wished to hold the key of all the learning in the State in his hands. They all dreaded the effects of a good education upon their narrow schemes, for they knew thirty-eight out of forty of the trustees were opposed to them in politics and would inculcate principles contrary to their wild and interested ideas of policy and government. Every attempt was made to prevent our obtaining a charter, but to no purpose. The characters of some of the projectors of the College were calumniated by them even in the public newspapers. Their shafts fell heavily upon me, but none of them penetrated even the cuticle. One while I was the projector. Then I was the tool of the enterprise. One while I was a fool and madman. Then I was a deep designing fellow. One while I was

the enemy of Presbyterians. Then I was an enthusiast in promoting their interest to the awakening of the jealousies of other societies. It is but justice to Dr. Ewing to own that he was the most violent in circulating these calumnies.

Such, as Rush understood it and as he wanted it understood, was the political background of the movement to found a western college. Rush himself believed he had given Nisbet a faithful and impartial account. "May I share in your friendship hereafter," he declared, "only in proportion as you shall find every word in this letter strictly true." As some later episodes will show, Rush possessed that sometimes useful but very disconcerting faculty of self-hypnosis which enables a person to believe that he cannot possibly be wrong. He was like Matthew Arnold, of whom it is reported that, upon being asked if he wasn't just as dogmatic as John Ruskin, he replied, "Of course I'm dogmatic. The difference between us is that Ruskin is often wrong."

Among other convictions, Rush held that the Presbyterian leaders in the state—Bryan and Ewing in particular—were bad men, whose unscrupulous conduct in the seats of power would wreck the College of Philadelphia, the Presbyterian Church, and civil government itself in the commonwealth. The college at Carlisle, he patiently explained to John Bayard after the Republicans in 1784 had failed to bring about a convention to alter the constitution, "by banishing ignorance and promoting knowledge in government as well as religion," would serve as one means of preventing "the decay of our members and con-

sequence in Pennsylvania." <sup>18</sup> Of Franklin College at Lancaster, which he helped to launch several years later, he had similar expectations. "From these two colleges," he told John Dickinson, "we hope will issue rays of knowledge which shall finally reform our constitution and laws, and humanize even the half-civilized inhabitants of the western counties of Pennsylvania." <sup>14</sup>

The task that Rush set for himself in planting a college beyond the Susquehanna was a tremendous one, beset with difficulties that would have overwhelmed a man of less resolution. He was virtually alone at the outset. Both friends and enemies clearly and insistently pointed out objections to his plan: there was no need for another college as yet in Pennsylvania; Carlisle was too remote; a single denominational basis was too narrow; adequate funds would not be forthcoming; an academy was what was needed, not a college. And so on. Rush was to find, from events, that all these objections were sound, though he never admitted them to be so. He staggered in the face of his difficulties—the tergiversation (as he believed) of friends, the assaults of enemies, the dearth of funds, his profound disappointment in the principal he had chosenbut he did not sink under them. "Give over our College! God forbid!" he exclaimed to John Montgomery, who had written a disheartened letter from Carlisle early in the struggle:

No, not if every trustee in the board (half a dozen excepted) perjured them selves by neglecting or deserting their

<sup>13</sup> Rush to Bayard, June 25, 1784, Rush Mss.
14 Rush to Dickinson, April 5, 1787, Logan Papers, Historical Society of Penn-

trust. I am neither tired nor discouraged. The necessity and advantages of a college at Carlisle appear the same now to me as they did in the year 1781 when we first projected it. We must succeed—unless the trustees at Carlisle are determined to chase learning as the Gadarenes once did Jesus Christ from their borders. I consider your languor as the only enemy we have now to encounter.<sup>15</sup>

To Rush the College was as dear, and as troublesome, as a child; it is therefore not surprising that he frequently used the imagery of the filial-parental relationship in speaking of it. For thirty years he fought its battles, guarded its funds, sought teachers, money, books, and equipment for it, exhorted the trustees, and cheerfully carried the burden of ultimate responsibility for its life and welfare. It never occurred to him to despair, not even when the first college building, erected by great and sacrificial effort, burned down at the moment of its completion. He never faltered in his conviction of eventual success. Writing Montgomery on 3 July 1802, he said:

Bingham's porch [an allusion to the spot where Rush and Montgomery had first discussed the plan for the College] may wear away, but the ideas conceived on it by two of the trustees will have their full accomplishment, and Dickinson College will one day be the source of light and knowledge to the western parts of the United States.<sup>16</sup>

This is, however, a story that has been well told before, 17

Rush to Montgomery, Jan. 14, 1785, Rush Mss.
 Rush to Montgomery, July 3, 1802, Rush Mss.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> First by Harry G. Good in Benjamin Rush and his Services to American Education (Berne, Ind., 1918) ch. iv; by Nathan G. Goodman in Benjamin Rush, Physician and Citizen (Philadelphia, 1934) ch. xv; and most fully by James Henry Morgan in the early chapters of Dickinson College . . . , 1783-1933 (Carlisle, 1933).

and it will not be repeated here. Two episodes that have not been told before pleasantly illustrate Rush's fond and vigilant care for his College.

The first concerns books for the Dickinson library. From the outset Rush importuned friends on both sides of the Atlantic for gifts of books. To John Coakley Lettsom, the Quaker physician in London, he wrote, for example, on 8 April 1785:

Will you give me leave to solicit your friendship to our College in begging a few books from your friends for our library? The sweepings of their studies will be very acceptable in our illiterate wooden country. The lumber of the stalls in the streets of London, which are sold by weight, would make us truly rich. It will give me great pleasure to make our trustees (who are composed, with a few exceptions, of the first men in the State) acquainted with your name, and to assist in transmitting it to posterity, in a country where the fame of learning and benevolence will exist, after both have yielded in every part of Europe to the admiration of splendid buildings, or to a veneration for hounds and horses.<sup>18</sup>

Such an appeal was bound to be successful, but among the books Lettsom sent was a thirty-volume set of the Journals of the House of Commons. Having consulted James Wilson, Rush thought he could obtain from the Pennsylvania Assembly a guinea a volume for these, which would, he pointed out to Montgomery, "purchase four times the number of more useful and necessary books for a college." <sup>19</sup> Montgomery evidently thought this step a little

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Thomas J. Pettigrew, ed., Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the late John Coakley Lettsom, M.D. (2v., London, 1817) II, 427.

questionable, even if Lettsom's name were inscribed in the books purchased, for in his next letter Rush exclaimed: "What-not exchange the Journals of the House of Commons for modern history or books on mathematics! Why, my friend, they will not be worth to us their carriage to Carlisle. We had better sell them to a pastry cook and get a neat edition cut in wood." 20 Rush did not like to be crossed. He had made up his mind that the Journals of the House of Commons were not fit reading for republican youths. In a report to the Board of Trustees at its April meeting, he said that he had bought an Encyclopedia Britannica and certain mathematical works and requested leave to sell the Journals in order to recover the sum expended. The Journals might "be useful in the State House library," he conceded, "but it would distress me to hear that a student of Dickinson College had ever wasted half an hour in examining even the title pages. He would find nothing in them but such things as a scholar and a gentleman should strive to forget." 21 This was Americanism with a vengeance. Rush usually had his way in these matters. But on this occasion his fellow trustees defied his wishes. The pernicious Journals are still in the Dickinson College Library.22

The second episode occurred during the bright dawn of Dickinson College in the spring of 1784. This was Rush's journey to Carlisle for the first meeting of the board of

Rush to Montgomery, Feb. 20, 1786, Rush Mss.
Rush to the Board of Trustees, [April ], 1786, Huntington Library.
This information is drawn from an interesting article published since the present paper was read: James W. Phillips, "The Sources of the Original Dickinson." College Library," now reprinted in this volume, infra.

trustees on the site of action. Since it was also Rush's first trip this far west, he kept, according to his custom when visiting new country, a little journal of observations, the manuscript of which has only recently come to light.<sup>23</sup> Covering the trip out and back, from April 2 to 12, the diary is matter-of-fact rather than literary or philosophical in tone, and records little not previously known concerning the history of the College. But Rush was an attentive observer of men and manners, and the extracts given here are a mere inadequate sampling of the sharp, significant details that summon up the life of post-revolutionary Pennsylvania.

Starting at ten in the morning, Rush traveled thirty-four miles the first day, having stopped to eat at two Quaker taverns on the way, and putting up at a third, Valentine's, for the night. One surmises he chose Quaker houses for political reasons: here he could listen to good anti-constitutional, anti-Presbyterian talk. Of one inn-keeper, Quaker in his sentiments but not wholly in his manners, Rush says that,

Upon my giving him an opening, he broke forth and cursed the minority,<sup>24</sup> the constitution, and the Presbyterians all in a breath.—"But I ask pardon, sir," said he. "I hope no offence. Perhaps, sir, you are a Presbyterian. I don't mean to be rude." "Say on, my friend," said I. "You can't offend me by anything you can say of any sect."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> It is owned by Mrs. Josiah C. Trent, of Durham, N.C., by whose kind permission it is quoted here.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> That is, of the Council of Censors, then in adjournment because the Republican majority had failed to obtain a large enough vote to summon a constitutional convention.

This was pleasant enough, and so was the first evening. spent alternately in reading, writing, and walking. An occasional inclination to take a pinch of snuff, Rush confesses, was restrained only "by recollecting how many pathetic, animated, and affectionate remonstrances I had received against it from my dear Mrs. Rush." The next day's travel brought him to Lancaster, where he found President Dickinson at the Sign of the Bear. That evening a half-dozen local political leaders and clergymen came in to pay their respects, and there was much agreeable talk on the evils of the constitution. On April 4, Rush and Dickinson continued on to Middletown; on the fifth they followed the river, the banks of which were littered with fragments of houses destroyed by a recent freshet, to Chambers Ferry, where they crossed and rode on to Carlisle. Rush noted almost incredulously that his landlord had "assisted in cutting down the trees that built the first log house in Carlisle," now a town of three hundred houses. The trustees convened in the Episcopal Church in Carlisle on the sixth at noon. A sermon on the utility of seminaries of learning was followed by dinner at John Montgomery's; at the Court House in the evening the trustees took the oaths required by law and engaged in a business session. Next day there was another session and a tour of the "public works"-the storehouse and barracks erected early in the Revolutionary War, which was under consideration for use a College building. On the eighth, with the election of Charles Nisbet as principal and James Ross as professor of languages, the trustees' business was concluded,

and they were entertained at an elegant dinner provided by the citizens of Carlisle.

The return trip was by way of York, where Rush had many friends to visit and spent two days. Among other errands, Rush commissioned a German artist named Fisher to cut the College seal after a design proposed by Rush himself and approved by the trustees at their recent meeting. (To grasp Rush's hopes for his infant seminary, one hardly needs to do more than to study the symbols on the seal he proposed. They were a liberty cap and telescope above an open Bible.) The rest of the trip, which took two days and a half, was pleasant if not eventful. After his leisurely ride through Lancaster County, Rush set down some observations to which he later often recurred:

The country over which we rode this day was equal in point of cultivation to any perhaps in the world. Stone houses and barns-large orchards-watered meadows-extensive fields of grain separated from each other with high fences, many of which were of posts and rails, everywhere presented themselves to our view. The contrasts between these settlements and the Irish [i.e., Scotch-Irish] settlements in Cumberland and York Counties was very great. I have described the latter formerly. One thing I omitted, and that is, near many of the houses in the Irish settlements we saw still houses. The quantity of rye destroyed and of whisky drank in these places is immense, and its effects upon their industry, health, and morals are terrible. I was sorry to hear that the Germans in some places were beginning to be corrupted with it. This is a poor reward to them for communicating their industry and arts in farming to the Irish, which is the case in Donegal, where many of them are as good and clean farmers as the

Germans, and where they have acquired wealth and influence. Mr. Whitaker, who keeps a brewery as well as a tavern, told me that beer is becoming every year more fashionable in the country, and that last year he sold 1000 barrels. Perhaps this excellent liquor may root out whiskey from our country.

The jaunt to Carlisle braced Rush in the peculiar selfsatisfaction he always felt when engaged in improving his country and his kind. He never concealed this self-satisfaction; in fact he took pains not to. In a letter to a coworker a few weeks later, he said:

I think with great pleasure of the zeal and uniformity discovered at our late meeting at Carlisle. Delightful task! to accompany the progress of population and government with the standards of science and religion! Happy county of Cumberland and highly favored village of Carlisle! your hills (once responsive only to the yells of savages and beasts of prey) shall ere long awaken our young philosophers from their slumbers to trace the planets in their courses! <sup>25</sup>

The relationship between Rush and Charles Nisbet, the Scots doctor of divinity whom Rush persuaded to come and serve as first principal of Dickinson College, would make an entertaining comedy. But the comedy would contain the tragic elements of disillusionment, frustration, and hatred as well. Rush and Nisbet were both men of strong convictions, and they found, no doubt to their mutual surprise, that most of their respective convictions were incompatible. One of the reasons for the trustees' choice of Nisbet was his reputation for learning, which was, by

<sup>25</sup> Rush to Linn, May 4, 1784, Rush Mss.

all accounts, well deserved. In Scotland he was called a "walking dictionary." He is said to have been able to repeat whole books of Homer and Virgil by heart and to have memorized Cowper's Task in two readings. Ashbel Green declared that he "was skilled in Hebrew, including the Chaldee, Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, German, and probably Erse." 26 Disregarding the question arising in one's mind as to how useful such accomplishments would be on the American frontier, the point is that Nisbet's pedagogy, like his scholarship, was old-fashioned. Rush, on the other hand, was a militant modernist in his educational thinking. He held, with Franklin, that Greek and Latin were largely useless lumber, and once ventured the opinion that, for Americans, a knowledge of the Indian languages would be more useful and fitting. His utilitarian educational program is well summarized in a statement made in 1788:

While the business of education in Europe consists in lectures upon the ruins of Palmyra and the antiquities of Herculaneum, or in disputes about Hebrew points, Greek particles, or the accent and quantity of the Roman language, the youth of America will be employed in acquiring those branches of knowledge which increase the conveniences of life, lessen human misery, improve our country, promote population, exalt the human understanding, and establish domestic, social, and political happiness.<sup>27</sup>

How far this was from the conservative views of Nisbet, whom Rush may have had specifically in mind when writ-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Samuel Miller, Memoir of the Rev. Charles Nisbet, D.D. (New York, 1840) 308. <sup>27</sup> "Plan of a Federal University," Federal Gazette, Oct. 29, 1788.

ing, is obvious. It is no wonder that the schoolmaster found few scholars who came up to his standards, and complained that "Learning is unknown and consequently not in request" in America.<sup>28</sup> And it is significant that Rush apparently never tried to institute any curricular reforms at Dickinson after Nisbet was established there.

Both men were Presbyterians, but they were far from agreement on theological issues. Some years after Nisbet's arrival, it is true, Rush gave public support to the Universalists then organizing in Philadelphia. Writing a friend in Scotland in the spring of 1797, Nisbet acidly remarked that "Dr. Rush was supposed to be a Socinian and an Universalist in October last, when I saw him, but it is possible that he may have changed his religion three or four times since that time." 29 A devout believer despite his various heterodoxies, Rush was completely tolerant toward the many denominations in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. This Nisbet hardly was. He would have placed Rush in the first of the "two great parties" which, he said, divided America, "the Anythingarians, who hold all religions equally good, and the Nothingarians, who abhor all religions equally." 30 Nisbet deplored the lack of governmental support for religious societies; evidently he would have liked to see a state church, preferably Presbyterian, re-established in America-an idea abhorrent to Rush's Jeffersonian principles.

<sup>28</sup> Nisbet to Charles Wallace, Aug. 19, 1791, New York Public Library Bulletin,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Nisbet to Wallace, May 18, 1797, New York Public Library Bulletin, I (1897) 314.

<sup>314.

80</sup> Nisbet to Wallace, Oct. 31, 1797, New York Public Library Bulletin, II (1898)
286.

These and other points of conflict between the two men reflected profound differences in their temperaments. Rush was an unhumorous optimist, holding that, with sufficient effort, the world could be made over according to rational principles and the City of God could be established on earth. "The devil who is the present tenant of our world," he once declared, "will not quit his hold of it till he has done the premises all the mischief that lies in his power, but go he must sooner or later." 81 This is Calvinist language but decidedly not Calvinist thinking. Dr. Nisbet was too orthodox ever to suppose for a moment that the Devil could be exorcized; indeed he found him remarkably active in the United States, and especially so in the vicinity of Carlisle. Nisbet derived some consolation for this distressing fact by indulging his vein of sardonic wit, as, for example, when he wrote Judge Allison after the fire in 1803: "We had been bothered by our trustees to make our College conform to Princeton College. We have now attained a pretty near conformity to it, by having our new building burnt down to the ground." 32 Twice in his life Rush found that wit was a weapon he could not cope with-in his quarrel with Cobbett and in his dealings with Nisbet. Years after Nisbet's death Rush cited him in a lecture on manners to James Rush as an example not to follow. Among the qualities for pleasing listed by Sir William Temple, Rush wrote-namely, truth, good sense, good humor, and wit-, the last is "the least

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in George R. Crooks, Dickinson College: The History of a Hundred Years ([Carlisle], 1883) 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Rush to Mrs. Rush, Aug. 21, 1793, Ms. owned by Mrs. Josiah C. Trent, of Durham, N.C.

necessary to command durable attention," though it is often mistakenly placed first.

It was the bane of Dr. Nesbitt's conversation and letters. He seemed to live only to make people laugh or angry. It was, I believe, from viewing the unfortunate propensity to ill-timed and indiscriminate wit in Dr. Nesbitt when a young man that Dr. Witherspoon said he would almost as soon whip a boy for wit as for lying.<sup>33</sup>

The worst of it was that Nisbet directed his shafts at those things which Rush had represented to him in the most favorable light and which Rush himself held most dear—for example, the College itself and American democratic institutions generally. In his letters of invitation to Nisbet, Rush had depicted Carlisle and the College in the most glowing terms. All was peace, harmony, and prosperity on the Pennsylvania frontier. Rising to one of those O! altitudo's that he employed with remarkable success in obtaining presidents for colleges, he pictured the new-born institution lifting its feeble hands to Nisbet in supplication:

To you, to you alone (under God), it looks for support and nourishment. Your name is now in everybody's mouth. The Germans attempt to pronounce it in broken English. The natives of Ireland and the descendants of Irishmen have carried it to the western counties. The Juniata and Ohio rivers have borne it on their streams through every township of the state that lies beyond Carlisle. Our saints pray for you as the future apostle of the church in this part of the world.

<sup>88</sup> Rush to James Rush, Dec. 22, 1809, Rush Mss.

Our patriots long to thank you for defending the cause of America at a time when and in a place where she had few friends: and our statesmen wish to see our youth formed by you for the various duties they owe to the republic.<sup>34</sup>

When the new principal arrived in Carlisle and discovered the reality behind this idyllic stage setting, he fell into a sort of morose fury and gave vent to sentiments that permanently alienated his patron. Everything was wrong. The rivers may have lisped Nisbet's name, but the climate gave him a fever and was unendurably hot; the little building where classes were held was hopelessly inadequate; the addition to it was a "hogpen"; the faculty was far too small; the college funds were non-existent; books were not to be had; Mrs. Nisbet found that meat could not be kept overnight without putrefying; and the roof leaked over the bedrooms! All this Nisbet wrote to Rush from what he chose to call the "Tomb of Dickinson's College," and to friends back home he wrote not only of these distresses but of the faithlessness of those who had invited him to assume the principalship and of the low estate of learning, religion, and virtue in America. Taken by surprise at first by these outbursts, Rush eventually replied to them only with silence, while to his British friends he explained that Nisbet's letters, from which extracts were appearing in the papers, "were written under a deranged state of mind, occasioned by a fever which fixed itself upon his brain." 35

After two or three years a modus vivendi was worked

Rush to Nisbet, undated but probably April 1784, Rush Mss.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Rush to Richard Price, May 25, 1786, Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings, 2nd ser., XVII (1903) 344.

out between the two men. In the 1790's Rush was absorbed in other struggles, and Nisbet, resigned to an exile's fate, lived on, as he phrased it, "like a pelican in the wilderness . . . without friends or society." 36 His further observation of popular government only deepened his distrust of it. To his friend Wallace in Edinburgh he could write in 1790 that "The most of our people have as little patriotism as religion, and many concurred in the Revolution merely to avoid paying their debts. I am afraid this country has not sense to govern itself. . . . The public men here are a mean set of rogues generally." 37 As the course of the French Revolution unfolded, Nisbet's anti-democratic jeremiads became almost hysterical. The Jacobins here, he warned, were fast bringing the United States to ruin, as the French Jacobins had already brought France to ruin. At the end of 1800 his pupil Samuel Miller consulted him about an intellectual survey of the closing century that Miller proposed to write—an idea which grew into a remarkable book called A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century. Nisbet's reply, dated from Carlisle on 16 December, begins: "Your design of preaching the funeral sermon of the 18th century is pious and rational." Among its noteworthy inventions, he pointed out, had been airballoons, the rights of man, the sovereignty of the people, and the guillotine, while in theology the century had advanced to "what seems the last stage of delirium, the indifference to all opinions in religion," as expounded by Mr.

<sup>26</sup> Nisbet to Wallace, Aug. 19, 1791, New York Public Library Bulletin, I (1897)

<sup>183.
87</sup> Nisbet to Wallace, Sept. 20, 1790, New York Public Library Bulletin, I (1897)
119.

Jefferson in his Notes on Virginia. "By the way," he interjected, "I have just learned with sorrow that he has been chosen President of the United States, and Burr Vice-President. God grant us patience to endure their tyranny." 38

Nisbet was not the man to confine his political opinions to private correspondence. He taught them in his classes. Chief Justice Taney, in his recollections of Dickinson College in the 1790's, relates that the young Jeffersonians among Nisbet's students—a majority, he believed—viewed these opinions as "monstrous heresies" and, despite regulations, did not take them down in their notes. Naturally these doings came to the attention of Rush, who had been a steady supporter of Jeffersonian principles since 1790. Nisbet's "high-toned Federalist politics," he felt sure, would permanently injure Dickinson College. A college, he wrote Montgomery,

should be of no party. Democratic money weighs as heavily in our treasury as the money of the Federalists. The western counties of the middle states, on which we depend chiefly for scholars, are in general Democrats. They should not be offended; on the contrary they should be allured to the College by the silence of our professors upon the subjects which do not belong to the essence of good government. Let Belzibub go on in making war upon bimself. Let Democratic tyranny and wickedness punish the overgrown crimes of monarchial tyranny in Europe. Schoolboys should have nothing to do with their squabbles, any more than with the battles of the

<sup>88</sup> Miller, op. cit., 268-269.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Quoted in Morgan, op. cit., 113.

tigers and wolves of our wilderness. It is enough if they are taught to love and admire our present excellent constitution, and to believe with its destruction will perish the remains of all the liberty in the world.<sup>40</sup>

That this would never come true during Nisbet's tenure of office, Rush well knew. But he knew just as well that there was nothing he could do about it. The two protagonists in the early struggle of Dickinson history had fought each other to a standstill. Those of Rush's sons who attended college were enrolled at Nassau Hall.

This little drama of character ends on a less unhappy note. With the abatement of the yellow fever epidemics in Philadelphia, the return of Cobbett to England, and the establishment of Jefferson as president, Rush's life was more tranquil and his spirit less frequently stirred to wrath. During this "era of good feeling" his attitude toward even Dr. Nisbet softened. One of the reasons he offered against enlarging the plan of the building to be constructed after the fire was the arrearages in Nisbet's salary. Salaries should be thought of, Rush pointed out, before the trustees got "swamped in mortar." Early in the following year Nisbet died—his salary arrearages, incidentally, still unpaid. With complete sincerity and perhaps a degree of contrition, Rush wrote to the same old friend:

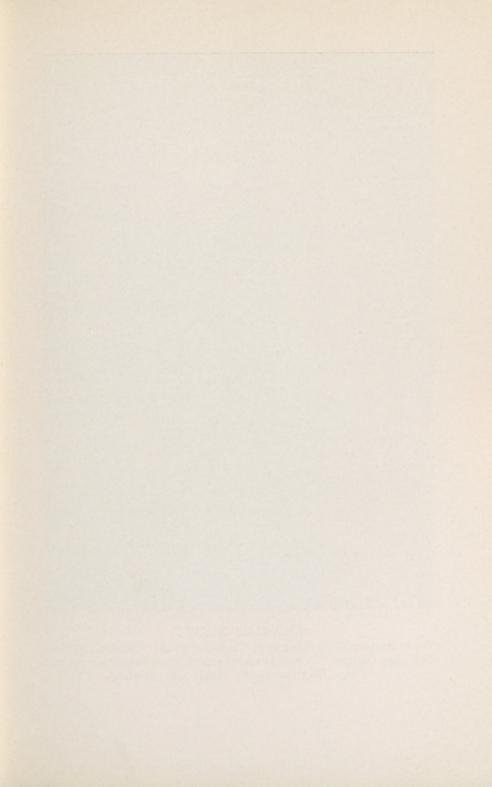
He has carried out of our world an uncommon stock of knowledge. Few such men have lived and died in any country. I shall long, very long remember with pleasure his last visit to

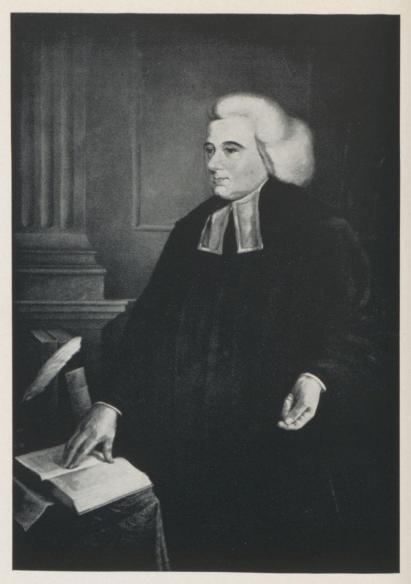
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Rush to Montgomery, June 21, 1799, Rush Mss. <sup>41</sup> Rush to Montgomery, May 30, 1803, Rush Mss.

Philadelphia, at which time he dined with me in company with Dr. Dwight of New Haven and Dr. Cooper of our state. His conversation was unusually instructing and brilliant, and his anecdotes full of original humor and satire. I hope the trustees have done honor to his memory by a funeral sermon and by defraying the expense of his interment.<sup>42</sup>

"Who," Rush adds at once, as if he betrayed too much feeling, "is to be his successor?" But that is another—and a complex and interesting—story.

<sup>42</sup> Rush to Montgomery, Feb. 4, 1804, Rush Mss.





CHARLES NISBET

From the portrait by Horace T. Carpenter in the President's Gallery, Dickinson College. The head is a copy from a small family portrait said to have been brought by Nisbet from Scotland.

# CHARLES NISBET, PORTRAIT IN MINIATURE \*

Boyd Lee Spahr
PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
DICKINSON COLLEGE

CHARLES NISBET was born in Haddington, Scotland, on January 21, 1736, the second son of William and Alison Nisbet. He died in Carlisle on January 18, 1804, in his twentieth year as President of Dickinson College, and is buried in the Old Graveyard there.

It is appropriate at this celebration of Founders' Day to commemorate the first President of the College and in doing so to endeavor to ascertain from the somewhat scanty records why he was chosen and what manner of man he was.

He was graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1754, in the nineteenth year of his age, and thereafter was a student in Divinity Hall in Edinburgh for six years. Apparently in those days, at least in Scotland, it took twice as long as now to produce a dyed-in-the-wool Presbyterian dominie!

He was licensed to preach in 1760 and, after two years

<sup>\*</sup> Address delivered at the Annual Founders' Day Convocation at Dickinson College on May 1, 1947.

in a church at Glasgow, was called to the parish of Montrose, a royal borough of importance on the east coast in Fofarshire, about half way between Dundee and Aberdeen. It appears that he rapidly acquired a reputation for learning, because in 1766, following the death of President Samuel Finley of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon, then minister of the Presbyterian Church at Paisley, Scotland, who had declined an invitation to come to America as President of Princeton, wrote suggesting the name of Nisbet. There is no record of what action, if any, the trustees of Princeton took upon this suggestion, but in the following year, Witherspoon reconsidered and was elected. It is of record that his reconsideration was due in part at least to the persuasion of Benjamin Rush, an alumnus of Princeton, who was then in Scotland doing postgraduate medical work; and there is every probability that Rush at that time met Nisbet.

The history of the evolution of the grammar school founded in Carlisle on March 3, 1773, by John and Thomas Penn, Proprietors of Pennsylvania, into the College in 1783, is given at length in Dr. Morgan's history of the College published in 1933, on the 150th anniversary of the granting of the College charter. The mainspring of this movement was Benjamin Rush. Rush was a professor in the medical school of the College of Philadelphia, but by the early 1780's, was at odds with the administration of the Philadelphia institution whose trustees had been ripped out of office by a radical legislature and supplanted by others who elected Dr. John Ewing as provost in place of Dr.

William Smith. Rush particularly disliked Dr. Ewing and his former friendship with Dr. Witherspoon of Princeton had considerably abated. As a result of these circumstances, he not only welcomed the idea of improving the grammar school in Carlisle but vigorously proposed that a college charter be obtained. Enlisting the support of John Dickinson, then president of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, and by offering inducements here, conciliations there, and beating down opposition, he succeeded in obtaining a charter on September 9, 1783. While Dickinson was elected the first president of the Board of Trustees, there is no doubt that that body was dominated by Rush. The details are to be found in Dr. Morgan's history and also in the excellent biography of Rush by Nathan P. Goodman, published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1934.

Promptly after the granting of the charter there were three meetings of the College trustees in Philadelphia. The fourth meeting was held in Carlisle on April 6, 1784. The College is in possession of a microfilm of Dr. Rush's diary of his trip to Carlisle for this meeting, which journey took a matter of three days from Philadelphia. At this meeting Charles Nisbet, doubtless at the urging of Rush, was elected Principal of the College at a salary of £250 sterling and a house, with an additional £50 sterling for the expenses of his voyage. On April 21, 1784, Dickinson wrote Nisbet, notifying him of his election, and Rush wrote him various letters painting the prospects of the College in glowing colors. On October 25, however, Dickinson wrote Nisbet suggesting delay, saying that he was apprehensive, due to

political changes, that the charter of the College might be repealed. On learning of this Rush was furious with Dickinson, saying in a letter to John Montgomery, the most active of the local trustees, that it was "big with ruin to our hopes"; and to counteract it he finally persuaded Dickinson to write Nisbet on November 15 in a more optimistic tone. Not satisfied with this, Rush and three other trustees wrote Nisbet on November 16, in which letter they stated that Dickinson's letter of October 25 was written without their knowledge and that they were "fully of the opinion that the charter of our college is as secure as any private property in the state."

The background of Dickinson's apprehensions was this. At the beginning of the Revolution practically all of the colonies adopted new constitutions. This was done in Pennsylvania in 1776, when the radical element in politics was in control. It was a unique document. Among other things, it provided for a unicameral legislature. In place of a governor there was a supreme executive council. There was also a council of censors, two from each county, which was to meet every seven years to consider the acts passed by the Assembly, to recommend new laws or repeals, to order impeachments, and to call constitutional conventions. Gradually the opposition mustered strength and, as it so happened, most of the opposition leaders were to be found among the trustees named in the College charter-Dickinson, Rush, William Bingham, James Wilson, and others. The conservative opposition was known by the name Republican, while curiously enough, the radical element was known as Constitutionalists because

it was that party which had succeeded in having the constitution of 1776 adopted. Eventually, the conservatives acquired a majority of the legislature and controlled it in 1783 when the College charter was granted. The history of these political quarrels is told in accurate detail by Dr. Robert L. Brunhouse, of the Dickinson Class of 1930, in his *The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania*, 1776-90, published by the Pennsylvania Historical Commission in 1942. By 1784 the radicals were again gathering strength and Dickinson, who was a cautious man, feared the worst.

It would seem that while Rush and the other trustees had not known in advance of Dickinson's discouraging letter of October 25, 1784, they must have had some intuition that Dickinson's support was somewhat lukewarm because there has come to light within only the last few years a letter from Dickinson to Nisbet, dated September 29, 1784, in which the familiar arguments of Rush are urged upon Nisbet. This letter is signed by Dickinson but was not written by him. The body of the letter appears to be in the handwriting of John Montgomery, but the language is the language of Rush. As a reconstruction it may be presumed that Rush wrote the draft of the letter, sent it to Montgomery, with the suggestion that he copy it and procure Dickinson's signature. The original of this letter was presented to the College a few years ago by Roscoe O. Bonisteel, Esq., of Ann Arbor, Michigan, of the Class of 1912. As it antedated Dickinson's discouraging letter of October 25, 1784, its purpose was largely nullified by the later letter, causing Rush to renew his efforts to allay Dickinson's fears, with the resulting letters of November

15 from Dickinson, and of November 16 from Rush and three other trustees.

The reasons for Nisbet's selection seem evident. He had publicly sympathized with the Colonists during the Revolution. Witherspoon's career at Princeton had been successful; another Scotch importation was indicated. Nisbet's reputation for scholarship would give the new College favorable advertising. And finally, he was Rush's choice, the slated selection.

After some hesitation, Nisbet accepted. With his wife, two sons and two daughters he arrived in Philadelphia on June 9, 1785, where he spent several weeks as the guest of Rush, during which time he visited his old friend, President Witherspoon, at Princeton. The Nisbets arrived in Carlisle, most appropriately, on July 4, 1785, and were met outside the town by a large concourse of citizens and formally escorted into it by a troop of horse. On the following day he was formally inaugurated.

The College plant was the old grammar school lot and building located on the north side of Pomfret Street, sixty feet west of Bedford Street. The lot's dimensions were 60 feet by 240, running north to Liberty Alley. The grammar school, a brick building with one room on each of its two floors, was located near the alley end of the property. The College at once enlarged the building with a stone addition, so that there were now four rooms, two on each floor. The size of the enlarged building was 23 feet by 60 feet; it was covered with plaster. Here the College remained until 1804. The old lot was subsequently acquired by the Carlisle School District, which owned it until 1946,

although the original building was destroyed by fire in 1860. In the Dickinsoniana Collection is the original deed from the Penns to the grammar school trustees and also the original deed from the Penns to the College, dated July 25, 1799, of the present main campus.

In addition to Nisbet, the members of the original College faculty were James Ross, who had been the principal of the grammar school, as professor of Latin and Greek; Robert Davidson, a graduate of the College of Philadelphia, as professor of history and belles lettres; Robert Johnson, also a graduate of the College of Philadelphia, as professor of mathematics; and Robert Tait, whose record is otherwise unknown, who was appointed "Master of reading and writing the English language." Of these Ross was the ablest and most distinguished. He was the author of Greek and Latin grammars which were in general use in colleges for the next fifty years. Davidson succeeded Nisbet as President in 1804 but he was always more of a clergyman than a college administrator.

In Scotland Nisbet had been a Whig and had openly espoused the cause of the American colonies. Probably he pictured America as a democratic Utopia. Disillusionment came soon. Carlisle was a town of approximately 1500 people. Outside of the professional men and a few gentry of landed property, the inhabitants were rough, many illiterate, mostly belonging to the radical element in politics, and many given to excessive drinking and physical brawls. The country at large was suffering from the aftermath of the Revolution. The Continental Congress was practically powerless and held in little respect.

The Articles of Confederation had proved inadequate as a basis of national union. All of these combined to shatter rudely Nisbet's preconceived ideas and he was not the man to keep quiet. Having been a Whig, he naturally became a Federalist and when, to the birth pains of the infant republic, evidenced by the struggle over the adoption of the Federal constitution, were added his dissatisfaction with local conditions, and especially, the illness which speedily overtook his family, his ready pen poured out a torrent of grievances. A month and a half after his inaugural he wrote Rush stating his intention to return to Scotland. It appears that the Nisbets were housed in a building at "the works," that is, Carlisle barracks, then unoccupied except for a military caretaker, and that the whole family was promptly stricken with malaria. His letter to Rush of August 18, 1785, said:

In short, Sir, we have been mistaken. I blame no body, but I feel such a daily decay, that I despair of enjoying health in this Continent, & pray God only to spare me & my poor Wife & family, that we may be able to sail for Scotland early in the Spring. I should have been glad to sail in the fall, but we are so disabled & weak, that I am afraid we could not be moved, till the fall Ships are all sailed. I shall be told perhaps that this is but a Seasoning & a gentle one, but from such Seasonings, Good Lord deliver us! Providence loves to write Vanity on Human Expectations. Perhaps I was too vain of the Opportunity that was offered me of disseminating right Notions & sound doctrine over a large Country. This made me slight the Advice of many of my friends, & the Tears of my affectionate Parishioners. Man proposes, & God disposes. Now I

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find that the Climate will put that out of my power in which I promised myself so much Satisfaction. Besides I cannot bear to see my Children pining to Death before my Eyes, & their flesh melting from off their Bones by the Action of the Sun. My Conscience charges me as guilty of Murder for having brought them into such a Climate & stimulates me to make haste to convey them out of it.

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I hope this Loss will be considered as coming from the Hand of God, & not occasioned by the fault of any Person however. You know I told you on landing that I had not come over the Atlantic to return again, & I think that I gave full proof of my Sincerity in this Profession, by leaving a fair Benefice & an affectionate People, & constraining my Wife & Children to follow me over three thousand Miles of Sea, to which I, as well as they, had the greatest Aversion. But God who rules over all things, seems to frustrate my Design. . . . I have had more Sorrow of heart since I landed on this Continent, than ever I thought of feeling in Life. My Sleep is gone from me, while I reflect on the one hand that it will look like Inconstancy for me to leave a place where I have been so kindly used, & on the other hand when I reflect that I have no home in Scotland, but must go over purely on Speculation, & my eldest Son, whom you have seen so athletic, lying groaning and motionless on his Couch, my Soul is wrung within me, & I can no longer think of exposing myself & those who are so dear to me, to so severe a Trial.

Two months later, on October 18, 1785, he formally tendered the trustees his resignation. However, with the passing of the malarial summer and the oncoming of winter, when probably the climate seemed more like that of

eastern Scotland, and the dire prospects of himself and his family mouldering into skeletons were not realized, he reconsidered and let it be known that he would accept reelection. The College collection contains the originals of interesting letters among Dickinson, Rush, General Armstrong and other trustees over the situation. Despite the fact that a coolness had arisen between Nisbet and Rush, the latter strongly urged his re-election and the trustees re-elected him on May 9, 1786.

The records of his teaching and of his administrative work during his twenty years at the College are, unfortunately, meager, particularly as to the latter. As to his teaching, he prepared and delivered between 1788 and 1791 some seven "courses" or series of lectures; one on logic; another on the philosophy of the mind; three which dealt with the three fields into which he divided moral philosophy; namely, ethics, oeconomics and politics; 1 a sixth on belles lettres, and a seventh on systematic theology. The whole number of lectures comprised in one of these courses was 418. They were delivered every day of the week except Saturday and Sunday, were fully written out, and slowly read, and each student was required to take them down verbatim. The courses were repeated in subsequent years. There are copies of his lectures in the College library, taken down in longhand by various students of the classes between 1792 and 1800.

As to his administration of the College, there is little

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> By "oeconomics" Dr. Nisbet meant social or domestic economics rather than political, while his treatments of "politics" approached more nearly what later was called political economy.

recorded. The trustees' minutes are scanty but there was no doubt that there was already present the unrest due to the insistence of the trustees in interfering with disciplinary and other routine matters of administration and their habit of looking upon the principal of the College as a hired employe, which unrest came to more than one crisis in succeeding administrations.

One of Nisbet's regular correspondents was William Young, a bookseller on Second Street in Philadelphia, who apparently was a sort of clearing-house for the learned men of the day. Nisbet frequently unburdened himself to Young. Thus, in a letter dated June 9, 1792, Nisbet wrote:

I must now return to my Labours, & not without many Difficulties. We sent out so many Students at our late Commencement, that we are much at a Loss for Recruits. Our Trustees gave a great many Degrees by Mandamus, to whom they chose, but concealed this Circumstance in the Account they gave in the Papers, to throw the whole infamy of the thing on the Masters.—One of the Ministers whom they made a Doctor of Divinity, almost stopp'd short in his Sermon, but the Trustees ly snug in their Concealment. One of our Masters has resigned, & we are in Doubts whether the Person whom the Trustees have elected to supply his Place for the time will be able to keep the Boys in Order. They have likewise ordered an Application to the Legislature for altering their Charter, no doubt to enlarge their own Powers, & to take away those of the Masters. The Cup of Slavery is a bitter one, but I must drink it. They never deign to talk with me of Business. How miserable is it to be subject to the meanest of Men!

This stricture appears to apply to the trustees as a body, but it must be borne in mind that most of those who had been most active initially were not so by 1792. Benjamin Rush had resumed his teaching in the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania, which had arisen from the merger in 1789 of the old College of Philadelphia and the University of the State of Pennsylvania, which the radical legislature had created in 1779. He also had what was probably the largest private practice in the country and his friendship with Nisbet had become at most lukewarm. John Dickinson, and especially James Wilson, had been active in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and in the successful efforts for the ratification of the Constitution. After this Dickinson practically withdrew from public life and was living in Wilmington, Delaware, and Wilson became one of the original members of the Supreme Court of the United States. William Bingham, the wealthiest member of the Board and probably the wealthiest man in the country, was spending a good deal of his time in England. It seems probable that Nisbet's reference was to the other trustees, including a number of clergymen, and it is a fact that both during his administration and those of his successors, until 1833, there was a lack of harmony between the trustees on the one hand and the Principal and the Masters on the other, for which, presumably, both sides were to blame. The Presbyterians were always good at family fights.

As to his attitude toward the undergraduates, there is in the College collection a letter from him to the father of

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Roger Brooke Taney, dated February 6, 1792, in which he says:

I am greatly pleased with your rational and parental affection for your Son's welfare, not only because such an affection is amiable in itself, & deserving of Esteem, but because from this I am persuaded that you will be disposed to give your Son such Directions & Injunctions, both with Regard to his Behavior, & his application to his studies, as may be of use to him, & render him obedient to the Directions which he receives from us. . . . Your Son's conduct & application to his studies is unexceptionable, but as every young man is exposed to bad Example, your frequent writing him & putting him in Mind of his Duty, & of your Affections & Expectations, will be one of the best means of preserving him from their Infection, & our Admonitions shall not be wanting. . . . Your Son is well, tho some few of our Students have been troubled with Colds & sore Throats.

As already referred to, political conditions were not to his liking. In the College collection are many of his letters expressing his views at great length. Quite a number of these are written to William Young, the bookseller in Philadelphia. A letter from him to Young, dated July 3, 1793, is in lighter vein. He wrote:

Some body who had a mind to laugh, or some Person whose Designs I cannot penetrate, has sent a Purple Silk Coat, directed to me, to Mrs. Nicolas's at the Conestoga Waggon, Market Street. Major Montgomery saw it, & would have brought it up in his Saddle Bags, but he was afraid of spoiling it. He told me that General Irvine, who knew as little of the History of this Coat as he himself did, would contrive to

bring it with him in the Stage which arrives on Saturday next Week. This Matter occasions much Speculation. If any body in your Place who intended a Toke, has made me a Present of a Silk Coat, I think they would have sent a Taylor to take my Measure, as you know that Mademoiselle Clairon the famous Actress did to Monsieur Marmontel, when he first went to Paris, & was ill provided of Cloaths. But as no such thing took Place while I was with you, I know not what to make of the Matter. I cannot imagine that the Citizen Minister, who probably had stole some Cloaths out of the Wardrobe of Louis the 16th, would have taken it in his head to make me a Present of any of them, unless you had given him Advice to that Purpose. And if the Matter is taken in a serious Point of View, I am no less at a Loss to guess at the Giver of this extraordinary Present, unless perhaps your Acquaintance the Pope of Rome has thought proper to promote me to the Purple by creating me a Cardinal. . . . But if this is the Case, he would have sent the red Hat along with it.

It will be seen from this letter that the royal purple gown approved some years ago by the Board of Trustees as the official garb of the President of Dickinson has a substantial precedent.

Despite the shabby little building on Liberty Alley, despite the lack of funds, and despite, or perhaps because of, Nisbet's dissatisfied but conservative views volubly expressed in his correspondence, and, it may be conjectured, because of Nisbet's beneficial influence on his students, the College prospered, at least in comparison with other colleges of the day. In his twenty years it had a total of 281 students. The number of these who later achieved fame is astonishing. Jonathan Walker of the class of 1787 became

a United States district judge; Charles Huston of the class of 1789 a justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania; Francis Dunlevy of the class of 1790 the chief framer of the Constitution of Ohio: James Smith of the class of 1792 the founder of the first vaccine institutions in America to provide protection against smallpox; Ninian Edwards of the class of 1792 chief justice of Kentucky, governor of Illinois and United States senator from Illinois; Matthew Brown of the class of 1794 the first president of Washington College and president of Jefferson College; Henry Lyon Davis of the class of 1794 president of St. John's College at Annapolis; Callander Irvine of the class of 1794 commissary-general of the United States Army; Jesse Wharton of the class of 1794 United States senator from Tennessee; Roger Brooke Taney of the class of 1795 Attorney-General of the United States, Secretary of the Treasury and Chief Justice of the United States; Henry Moore Ridgeley of the class of 1797 United States senator from Delaware; John Floyd of the class of 1798 governor of Virginia; John Bannister Gibson of the class of 1798 chief justice of Pennsylvania; William Wilkins of the class of 1802 United States senator from Pennsylvania, minister to Russia, and Secretary of War.

President Nisbet published very little. Some articles from his pen appeared in British reviews prior to his coming to America. His inaugural address was also printed but in the last years of his life he flatly refused to have his College lectures published. However, the testimony of his contemporaries is that his learning was prodigious. He was the master of eight or nine languages and was frequently

referred to as a walking encyclopaedia. In Dr. Morgan's history and also in Nisbet's biography by Samuel Miller, professor in Princeton Theological Seminary, published in 1840, are statements by various contemporaries, such as his students, Taney, Gibson and Brown, and by Justice Hugh H. Brackenridge of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania who lived in Carlisle, and Ashbel Green, who was President of Princeton from 1812 to 1821, as to the amazing scope of his learning.

He was also noted for his wit. Two stories concerning Witherspoon are particularly apt. One is that Nisbet complained to Witherspoon that he had a ringing in his head and asked Witherspoon the cause of it, to which Witherspoon replied that it was because it was cracked. Nisbet to Witherspoon, "Have you any ringing in your head?" "No." "That," said Nisbet, "is because it is empty."

The other is that Witherspoon was presiding as moderator of a presbytery, and according to custom, a large tankard of ale was passed around. Witherspoon took an unusually long draught of it, whereupon Nisbet remarked that the moderator was not the mouthpiece of the meeting in all things.

In the Dickinsoniana Room there is a portrait in miniature of him painted in oil which is thought to be the one he brought with him from Scotland. The gilt frame has as its chief decoration the Scotch thistle. This or its duplicate in the possession of his great-great-granddaughter, is the original of all paintings and etchings of him. Miller says in his biography that it was painted when Nisbet was about forty years of age, or about 1776. Miller describes him as

rather below middle height, slim and agile in early life but corpulent by middle age, and that his motions were rapid physically as well as intellectually. He is buried in the Old Graveyard, where a stone erected by his son, Judge Alexander Nisbet, of the class of 1794, contains a lengthy Latin epitaph attributed to John Mitchell Mason, President of

the College from 1821 to 1824.

Of the four children who came to America with their parents, Thomas, the older son, died unmarried shortly after his father's death. Alexander, the younger, graduated from the College in 1794, studied law, and became prominent in Baltimore as a judge and as president of the Northern Central Railroad. The older daughter, Mary, married William Turnbull, of Pittsburgh, later of Baltimore. Descendants of Alexander, through his daughters, and of Mary occupy today, as Dr. Morgan puts it, "enviable positions" in Baltimore and elsewhere. The younger daughter, Alison, married as his second wife Dr. Samuel A. McCoskry, a physician of Carlisle and a trustee of the College, 1783 to 1815. Their son, Samuel Allen McCoskry, of the class of 1824, became the most distinguished of Nisbet's descendants. After a few years as a lawyer in Carlisle, he studied theology, was ordained as a priest of the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1833 and in 1836 became the first bishop of the Diocese of Michigan, over which he presided for forty-two years. Oxford conferred on him the degree of doctor of civil laws, a rare honor for an American in those days. His portrait in oil is in the College's fine arts collection, as is also a beautiful miniature painted in Paris. It would be interesting to know the rea-

son for his transition from the Calvinism of his ancestors to ritualistic Anglican service.

The cornerstone of the first West College was laid on June 20, 1799. Nisbet had not looked with favor on the purchase of the campus, preferring the acquisition of the government works. The building was not completed until the early part of 1803; in fact, was not entirely finished but in use, when on February 3, 1803, it was burned. This occasioned a letter from Nisbet to his friend, Judge Alexander Addison, dated February 12, 1803, now in the Darlington collection at the University of Pittsburgh, in which he said:

This awful visitation of Divine Providence has taken more from them than all that they have unjustly taken from me, tho' I do not think it will awaken them to do me justice. I have been meditating on Jer. 22:13, 'Woe unto him that buildeth his house in unrighteousness and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbor's services without wages, and giveth him not for his work.'

Despite this malediction on the trustees, they proceeded with unwonted energy to collect funds for a new building and had the good fortune to secure as its designer the most distinguished architect in the country. The cornerstone was laid August 8, 1803, while Nisbet was still living, but the building was not occupied until November 1805, following his death. While there is no record of it, it is to be hoped that as this majestic building took form, Dr. Nisbet changed his mind. If he could today see it and the other buildings and grounds which now comprise the College

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plant, I think he would retract his criticisms and would join with Rush, who called the early College "the dear petulant brat," in believing that their labor was not in vain. Despite his handicaps, disappointments and irrascibility, Charles Nisbet builded better than he knew. To him, and also to Dickinson and Rush, we must give all credit and honor for the foundation of what the College now is.

# A Frontier Experiment with Higher Education \*



Joseph B. Smith

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HEN Benjamin Rush heard of the interest of some gentlemen of the village of Carlisle in expanding the facilities of a grammar school in their town, he took this opportunity to press for the establishment of a college there. He, and those whom he interested in the plan, were apparently mostly concerned with the fact that "the great number of representatives in assembly that this immense Western Country will furnish—makes it of the most serious importance to establish a seminary of learning amongst them." Rush had become alarmed at the operation of the state constitution, written in 1776 when Pennsylvania was at the height of revolutionary fever. This constitution had given the western counties a share in the

<sup>\*</sup> The Boyd Lee Spahr Lecture delivered at Dickinson College on April 30, 1948; originally published in *Pennsylvania History*, XVI (1949) 1-19; and reprinted here with the permission of the editor.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> William Bingham to John Montgomery, London, August 10, 1783. Except as otherwise noted, all letters cited here are in the Dickinson College Library. Cf. Lyman G. Butterfield, "Benjamin Rush and the Beginnings of John and Mary's College Over Susquehanna," supra.

government for the first time. When an act of the legislature made the College of Philadelphia a state institution in 1779 on the ground that it was a hot-bed of Toryism, Rush felt that it was time to act. The chartering of Dickinson College in 1783 was evidently motivated, therefore, by the desire of the long-dominant seaboard minority to infiltrate the frontier, which had become, at last, a politically equal part of Pennsylvania.

In their zeal, however, Rush and his friends did not give much thought to the reaction the frontier community might have to their scheme. One of the most colorful men who lived on the Pennsylvania frontier in this period has left a fictionalized but highly illuminating account of what that reaction was. Hugh Henry Brackenridge, born in Scotland in 1748, graduate of Princeton, 1774, chaplain in the American Revolution, 1777, sometime schoolmaster, editor, and judge of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, lived in Carlisle from 1801 until his death in 1816.2 While at Carlisle he published, in 1804-05, the final two volumes of his satire, Modern Chivalry. This novel, satirizing the manners and morals of the frontier, is a mine of information on popular attitudes toward such matters as the Whiskey Rebellion, the French Revolution, local politics, education and the law.

In the early part of the added matter published at Carlisle, the town in which the principal character lives is strikingly like the one in which the author resided. It is a small community with a college, newspaper, tavern and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> D. Wilson Thompson, Early Publications of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1785-1835 (Carlisle, 1932) 41ff; Dictionary of American Biography, II, 544-545.

coffeehouse.<sup>3</sup> Although there seems little doubt, whether he was talking about Carlisle is not so important as what he has to say about the attitude of the people toward higher education. This attitude he presents very vividly with the following incident:

The doctrine of abating nuisances had been much in conversation lately. It came so far that an incendiary proposed to abate, or burn down, the college.—A town meeting had been held on the occasion and whether from a wish to see a bon-fire; or from the hatred of the ignorant to all that places the informed above them, the proposition, however unreasonable, had its advocates. It had been actually carried and a person was on his way with a brand lighted to set fire to the building—The principal and professors had harangued in vain. It was threatened that if they did not stand out of the way they would be burned with the college.<sup>4</sup>

This never happened in Carlisle, nor in the village in the novel, but the early history of Dickinson College was a grim struggle for survival. As Brackenridge later explained, "I will not say that people talk of burning colleges, but they do not talk much of building them up." <sup>5</sup> Rush had been warned that the community was not ready for a college, that students would be hard to find, that funds would be difficult to raise, that what was needed was only an academy. <sup>6</sup> An examination of the problems of the col-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Modern Chivalry, Part II (2v., Carlisle, 1804-1805) I, 141-142, 163; Thompson, op. cit.

Brackenridge, op. cit., I, 48-50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Alfred Nevin, Men of Mark of Cumberland Valley, Pennsylvania, 1776-1876 (Philadelphia, 1876) 110.

lege in the light of a study of the community will show to what extent and why these warnings were accurate.

Carlisle had been incorporated by an act of the legislature a little over a year before Dickinson College received its charter.7 The village, hence, was emerging from the status of primitive frontier outpost. When it was founded, some thirty years before, it had been merely a collection of a few houses around a fort, a small cluster of white men in Indian country. The population was highly homogeneous, consisting in the first three decades of its existence almost exclusively of Scotch-Irish families. By 1782, a few Germans had moved into the community, but of the 1500 souls in Carlisle in 1795, not more than a dozen or so were of this nationality.8 In 1778, the earliest record of population, which actually is a list of taxpayers, although the unit of taxation was small enough to make the figures fairly significant, listed 233 persons and among the property were twenty-six Negro slaves.9 The inhabitants, then, should not be pictured as wearers of the coonskin cap when they are referred to as frontiersmen. The term frontier, as used here, is meant to describe the political and social attitude that the people of Carlisle appear to have had. There was a tendency to place individual freedom above the so-called national interest, as seen in their attitude toward the Whiskey Rebellion, their support of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Sherman Day, Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1843) 268.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Conway P. Wing, History of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1879) 234-245.

Pennsylvania Archives, 3rd series, XX.

French Revolution, their Jeffersonian politics, and their lack of enthusiastic support of higher education.

Carlisle was, as has been said, emerging from the earliest stage of frontier settlement by the time of the chartering of Dickinson College in 1783. It had become the county seat in 1751. A courthouse was erected in 1765-66. Thus the town had very early attained some distinctions to set it off from other communities of its type. On August 10, 1785, appeared the first edition of a newspaper, The Carlisle Gazette and Western Repository of Knowledge. Its publisher was George Kline, whose activity as a printer gave him the distinction of being the chief disseminator of culture for the area. He was a staunch Jeffersonian. 10 Kline and Archibald Loudon, who after 1790 ran a book store, bindery and printing office, turned out nearly one hundred imprints of various kinds.

The most ambitious literary activity of the period was the formation of a library company in March 1797. The committee that drew up the rules for the library consisted of such local leaders as Dr. James Armstrong, President Nisbet of Dickinson College and Dr. Davidson of its faculty. Besides some quaint rules, such as the one which cautioned: "the members will be careful not to hold the books too near the fire nor permit children to have them," 11 the library company was notable for its collection. Later in the spring of 1797, appeared a "catalogue" of proposed books and books being purchased that was full of modern works; that is, of the writings of Hume, Gib-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Thompson, op. cit., 2. <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 21.

bon, Voltaire, Jefferson, Franklin, Washington, Montesquieu, Adam Smith and others.

That the founders planned the library to have wide influence in the surrounding countryside is shown by another rule: "members living within five miles of Carlisle shall return folio and quarto volumes within four weeks, and octavos and smaller books within two weeks. Those living more than five miles from town shall have double this time to return their books." <sup>12</sup> The company lasted barely nine years, however, and its disappearance from lack of interest is evidence that the town was not in the stage of development that some of its leading citizens thought it was.

Life was still closer to the pursuit of savage enemies than the pursuit of information from Johnson's Lives of the Poets. That this was so may be illustrated by the number of executions and public whippings Carlisle witnessed. In the nine years from 1779 to 1787 eleven men and two women were hanged, three having been found guilty of murder, three of robbery, two of burglary, two of counterfeiting, one of rape and one "of an unmentionable crime." <sup>13</sup> There had been 153 whippings, averaging twenty lashes, from about 1751 to 1785 when the practice was abandoned. Considering that the population of Carlisle was under 1500 and the population of Cumberland County was less than 18,000 in that period, these statistics would seem to reveal a rather high incidence of crime. <sup>14</sup>

14 Day, op. cit., 262.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Carlisle Civic Club, Carlisle Old and New (Harrisburg, 1907) 22. I have been unable to learn the nature of this "unmentionable crime."

In November 1785, a horse thief was found guilty and sentenced as follows:

Judgement: that the prisoner, Daniel Clayton, be taken from hence to the jail and from thence on Wednesday next, the 30th of November, between the hours of 8 and 10 o'clock a.m., be taken to the common whipping post, that he stand in the pillory one hour, have both his ears cut off and nailed to the pillory, and then and there receive thirty-nine lashes on his back well laid on, restore the horse stolen to the owner, if not already done, or the value thereof, pay a like value to the President of the State for support of the Government, pay costs of prosecution and stand committed until the whole be complied with.<sup>15</sup>

One poor creature had merely been hanged for "an unmentionable crime."

Harsh punishment was, of course, common in America of this period. But there is other evidence of rough and ready living besides the number of severe punishments. "On Saturday morning last," Kline's Gazette reported June 27, 1793, "a duel was fought near this place by Messrs. John Duncan and James Lamberton, when the former unhappily received a ball in his head which instantly deprived him of life. By this melancholy accident his wife has lost an affectionate husband, his five children a tender parent, and society one of its most valuable citizens." <sup>16</sup> The victim of this duel was the son of Judge Thomas Duncan of the State Supreme Court. His second was James Blaine, son of Ephraim Blaine, at whose home

15 Carlisle Civic Club, op. cit., 22.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, op. cit., 7, quoting Kline's Gazette, June 27, 1793.

George Washington was entertained when he visited Carlisle in 1794 on his way to quell the Whiskey Rebellion. His conqueror later became a general of the militia in the War of 1812. It can be seen, therefore, that the participants of this duel were from the same level of society as the founders of the library company.

Duelling was not the only violence known to Carlisle in the last decade of the eighteenth century. The year before the duel described above, Dr. Nisbet wrote,

A spirit of madness and riot seems to have taken possession of this place lately. The soldiers here have been several times fighting with Negros, and almost everyday with one another. Sundry people have been wounded; one Bovard, an Irish reedmaker has this day almost murdered a woman who lived with him as his housekeeper. Yesterday, a drunken Nailer sallied out with an ax and hammer to knock down everybody he could meet with. He wounded sundry persons among whom were two students and he is now in Gaol. But he will soon get out again as evildoers here have no punishment to dread.17

One wonders what punishment the sturdy Presbyterian divine had in mind when the number and kind of punishments meted out are recalled.

Into this community Charles Nisbet had come in 1785 to take office as principal (the title then given the president) of the new college. He had been selected because of his reputation as a scholar and because he was considered politically safe. 18 As the years passed, this last qualification

Nisbet to William Young, June 9, 1792.
 Butterfield, "Benjamin Rush and the Beginnings of John and Mary's College Over Susquehanna," supra.

became a liability to him and to the school. Rush's conservatism of 1783 faded before his abundant enthusiasms for numerous social experiments. He and his college president had many quarrels. Even more important, Nisbet's views clashed more and more sharply with those of the majority of his fellow townsmen. As will be seen, he differed from them on every public issue, and he was not afraid to express himself. This frequent angry disapproval explains why he thought "evil doers have no punishment to fear." He was convinced that the political views and activities of the townsmen were evil. The people of Carlisle thought and acted as though men were equal—an idea abhorrent to the reverend doctor.

When the new principal arrived he was given a public reception and conveyed to quarters in the "public works" or barracks, that had been erected during the Revolutionary War. On July 5, 1785, he was inaugurated principal of Dickinson College. The new principal was immediately beset with problems that proved, in the main, unsolvable. First, there was the lack of funds; next, was the problem of acquiring enough students and keeping them at work once acquired; then there was the fact that the college building was "a small and shabby one fronting on a dirty alley"; <sup>19</sup> and finally, there were innumerable quarrels between faculty and trustees over these and other matters. A study of these problems reveals two things; if there had been a "spirit to build colleges up" in Carlisle many of them would have been overcome; and, had Nisbet

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Edward W. Biddle, The Old College Lot (Carlisle, 1920) 8, quoting Roger B. Taney.

been a different sort of man, that spirit might have arisen.

The basic financial problem was that the College had no money. There were the lands which John Dickinson, in whose honor the College was named, had turned over to it; and there was some assistance from the legislature. The trustees also relied upon various subscription drives. The sum of £2,839, 12s., 6d., was raised before the second meeting of the board, April 6, 1784.20 But subsequent drives failed to live up to expectations. When it is remembered that one of the drives was an attempt by John Montgomery, a Carlisle trustee, to have his friend William Bingham try to raise money in England two years after the close of the Revolutionary War, the expectations of the trustees seem to have been a little high. Bingham reported in a letter dated December 29, 1783, that although "I inform them-of the beneficial effects that would result to humanity from planting the seeds of knowledge in that western country, at present so remote from all access to the improvement of the human mind," his efforts met with no success. He rightly commented on the failure of his mission "whilst the effects of the American war were so visible in the marks of public and private distress"; and he said later in the same letter that "all solicitation for the support of American establishments would be ineffectual." 21

This was not the only scheme the trustees had in mind, however, and it is the attempts to raise money in the community and surrounding area that are of most interest to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Wing, op. cit., 104. <sup>21</sup> Bingham to the Board of Trustees, Dec. 29, 1783.

this discussion. Abraham Blumer, presiding over the assembly of the German Reformed Church meeting at Reading in April 1785, lauded the "undertaking of founding a nursery of learning and religion." To the request for financial support he replied, "we make no doubt that as many of us and of them under our care as have occasion will encourage it by sending their sons thither." <sup>22</sup>

Dr. Nisbet, like many a modern college president, went on trips around the state trying to raise money.<sup>23</sup> He had this to say about his reception on such business trips: "When it [Dickinson College] sought subscriptions from individuals it was met with the charge of sectarianism, when it solicited donations from the state, it was accused of political heresies and exposed to investigating committees." <sup>24</sup>

The replies Nisbet reported receiving from those who were asked to contribute, take on added significance when the arguments that were advanced in support of the College at the time of Brackenridge's supposed arson are examined. The best that could be said for not burning the College was none too good. The "Captain," Brackenridge's principal character, took it upon himself to prevent this terrible deed from being done. But he had to be careful in what he said.

"Gentlemen," said he, "it is not for the College I speak, it is for yourselves. Your object is to put down learning and do you not know that it is put down already.—the Method-

24 Nevins, op. cit., 110, quoting Nisbet.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Abraham Blumer to the Board of Trustees, April 28, 1785. <sup>23</sup> "Report on the State of Funds," undated memorandum, Dickinson College Library.

ists are the best preachers. Take a horse jockey and in two weeks from the jump, he is in the pulpit—why burn the College? The building will serve useful purposes when the professors are driven out of it.—

"I do not know," said a sedate man among the crowd, "whether after all a little learning may not be in some cases useful.—I mean to say, that a young man before he comes to years of discretion may as well be employed in learning to make marks on paper as playing at nine-men's-morrice, and it does him no more harm to try to read Greek, than to trace partridge tracks. The mind must be employed in something to keep it out of harm's way, and seclusion in a seminary is useful if for nothing else at least it keeps young people within doors.—And tho' a great part of learning is but the knowledge of hooks and crooks, yet the exercise of the mind renders them more expert in thinking and tho' Latin is of no more use to raise the devil these days than English, yet it is a gentle exercise to learn it and makes the boys grow faster." <sup>25</sup>

A statement of Nisbet corroborates this. In 1792 he commented sharply to his friend William Young, a Philadelphia bookseller, "I know of no body here who buys any books except Mr. Tate. You know we are all so wise here already, that we do not need any instruction." <sup>26</sup>

This was evidently the state of mind of the people of Carlisle, for on Nisbet's journeys and in his local attempts he was able to raise practically no money. In 1791, and again in 1798, the legislature had to come to the aid of the struggling College with grants of £1500 and £3000, respec-

<sup>25</sup> Brackenridge, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Nisbet to Young, June 9, 1792.

tively. "Planting the seeds of knowledge" among the frontier farmers was evidently viewed by them as investment in a blighted crop.

In lieu of financial support, it will be recalled, the German Reformed congregation had promised students. But an examination of the College class lists in the first sixteen years of its existence fails to reveal that they lived up to this less exacting promise. Judging by the names, the predominant racial component of the student body was Scotch-Irish.<sup>27</sup> This, of course, is not surprising when it is remembered that the College was Presbyterian and that the Pennsylvania frontier as a whole, not only Carlisle, was predominantly of that national group.

An examination of these class lists reveals other interesting information besides the homogeneity of the student body. The majority of the students entered the ministry. Since it was a Presbyterian school, this was natural, for the Presbyterians were insistent on college education for their clergy. Hence the remark in Brackenridge concerning the evangelical Methodists. Moreover, this vocational pattern, training students for the ministry, was common to all the colonial colleges.

There were nine graduates in the first graduating class, the class of 1787; there were thirteen of the class of 1788; nine of the class of 1789; twelve of the class of 1790; thirty-three of the class of 1792; thirteen of the class of 1794; thirteen of the class of 1795; nine of the class of 1797; twenty-four of the class of 1798; eight of the class of 1799; and five of the class of 1800. There were no

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> George L. Reed, Alumni Record of Dickinson College (Carlisle, 1905) passim.

graduations in the years not mentioned. One of the most striking things about these early classes is the unexpectedly advanced age of the graduates. The youngest graduate of the class of 1787 was nineteen, for example, but the oldest was thirty. Of the 148 graduates of these classes, only twenty-two were under twenty years of age, while eight were over twenty-five. A comparison with Harvard in its comparable early period, as presented by Samuel Eliot Morison, reveals just how high the average age of the Dickinson graduate was. The oldest Dickinson graduate was William Stewart of the Class of 1795, who was born in Ireland in 1759, and hence was forty-six when he received his degree and entered the ministry.

The above figures are not complete. Vital statistics for about one-fourth of the students are missing and in some classes many members were not graduated. On the basis of existing material, however, one conclusion might be ventured. That is, the College evidently fulfilled one type of frontier need, namely, the opportunity for self-improvement. Only thirty of the students of the College in this period were from Carlisle or nearby, however. The principal area from which students seem to have been drawn appears to have been the South and Southwest. When it is remembered that Carlisle was located in the Cumberland Valley, one of the highways to the early Southwest, it is clearer why students came from those areas. From the standpoint of enrollment, then, Dickinson did not receive much support from the community,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Samuel E. Morison, Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, 1936), 76.

yet the location of Carlisle was an important factor in its growth.

A more attractive College building and some sort of accommodation for the students would have helped to increase the enrollment and prestige of the school, Nisbet believed. In this, after about fifteen years, his hopes were realized. During those first years, however, College classes met in the grammar school. Nowhere does the original College building receive a flattering description. It was located on lot 219 of the original plan of the town, extending from Pomfret Street to Liberty Alley, and was situated some sixty feet west of Bedford Street.<sup>29</sup> The original deed to the property is dated 1773, but the exact date of the erection of the school building is not known. It is known, however, that an addition to the original building was built in 1785.

During the period in which it was used by the College, the grammar school was taught on the first floor and the College classes met on the second. There were only four rooms, two upstairs and two down.<sup>30</sup> It was evidently not the pleasant place that a College advertisement in the Philadelphia papers in 1787 made it appear.<sup>31</sup> John Penn, who came to Carlisle in April 1788, described it as a "small patched-up building of about 60 by 15 feet." <sup>32</sup> Nisbet went further in expressing his disapproval. He said in a letter to the trustees, written November 13, 1786,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Biddle, op. cit., 3. <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 7,

<sup>31</sup> Columbian Magazine, inside wrapper of February 1787 number.

the mean appearance, the small dimensions and dirty entries of the building prepared for the accommodation of students must create a considerable prejudice against the college in the eyes of the public who are commonly led by appearances. For proof of this the trustees may ask every stranger who passes through this place and enquires for the college.<sup>33</sup>

As time went by, his words grew sharper: "The managers of all the seminaries in the world, except this one," he said in a letter to the trustees dated October 31, 1791,

have always taken care to provide some convenient building—which might attract the notice and attention of students; whereas, the very mean appearance of that hovel in this town wherein classes are taught at present and its situation in a deep pit of thick clay, naturally suggest the most disagreeable ideas.<sup>34</sup>

Not only was the building undesirable for classroom uses, but it provided no accommodations for the students, and, as the President complained, "there are very few convenient lodgings to which they can have access." <sup>35</sup> The faculty and local trustees took in some of the boys, for there were not adequate public houses in which they might lodge. Nisbet was very worried, in any case, about the moral problems involved in students living there.

Prodded by these and similar remarks the trustees did consider an idea suggested by John Dickinson and warmly supported by Nisbet in several letters, namely, that the College purchase from the government the "public works," in which Nisbet himself had been temporarily

25 Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Nisbet to the Board of Trustees, Nov. 13, 1786. <sup>34</sup> Nisbet to the Board of Trustees, Oct. 31, 1791.

deposited. Dickinson once, and Rush another time, attempted to get the national congress to sell, but the plan failed both times.36 However, money was the principal obstacle; but, aided by a legislative grant in 1798, the trustees were better able to purchase a tract of land from the "out-lots." There followed fairly soon the first successful subscription campaign, and work was begun on a "suitable building." It seems safe to conclude that Nisbet was correct; had there been a building to "attract the notice and attention of students," the drawing power of the College would have been greater; but money was hard to obtain from a community not overly enthusiastic about its College.

Not only was it difficult to draw many students to the little "patched-up" College, but it was difficult to keep them and to make them do any work. The reasons for this were partly financial again, but also might be attributed to the desire of the frontier lads to get their book-learning fast. These matters were not easily settled because the faculty could be overruled by the trustees on all matters of discipline.

The College did not have sufficient funds to make it independent of tuition fees. The students were aware of this. As one critical analysis of the situation put it, "when students know the faculty depends on them for daily bread and that their withdrawal or expulsion will close the doors of the institution, they have a firm conviction that they are masters of the situation." 87

Nevin, op. cit., 110.
 William Neill to Board of Trustees, Sept. 7, 1827.

This situation persisted long after the period reviewed here, and was made worse because the students could appeal over the faculty directly to the trustees. As late as 1829 President Neill complained about this to the trustees. Alexander McClelland had to defend himself before the Board because he made a mild suggestion that one of the students had plagiarized an English theme. Neill wrote, "When a student is presented for dismission or expulsion do the Board claim the right of pardoning him in toto, thus taking all discipline in the case out of the hands of the faculty." 38

A more serious complaint was that the trustees, under pressure of the financial problem, were willing to ignore academic standards. Nisbet wrote his friend, William Young, in 1792:

We sent out so many students at our late commencement that we are much at a loss for recruits. Our trustees gave a great many degrees by mandamus, to whom they chose, but concealed this circumstance in the account they gave the papers to throw the infamy of the thing on the masters.<sup>39</sup>

About 1798 they went still further and decided to grant A.B. degrees for one year's work. This infuriated the President, but pleased the students and actually made the financial problem worse. "Their act for annual commencements which restricted the time of study to one year, had taken away \(^2\)3 of the tuition money and reduced the reputation of the seminary more than \(^3\)4," Nisbet

<sup>29</sup> Nisbet to Young, June 9, 1792.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.; Alexander McClelland to the Board of Trustees, Feb. 14, 1829.

wrote.40 Although a three-year course was restored after 1800, the damage had been done. No one wanted to wait that long to get a degree. "With regard to the few we have at present," the President wrote to the trustees in 1802, "all that entered since 1798 expected to finish their studies in a year, . . . each class that entered since 1798 thought that they had a right to be as ignorant and to pay as little for their learning as their predecessors." 41

Nisbet had other worries with the trustees besides these matters of academic standards. He never received the salary that had been promised him. The bickerings over this matter were long and complicated. He threatened several times to institute law suits for his arrears. And once he complained bitterly that

they [the trustees] have . . . ordered an application to the legislature for altering their charter, no doubt, to enlarge their own powers and to take away those of the masters. The cup of slavery is a bitter one but I must drink it. They never deign to talk with me of business. How miserable to be the subject of the meanest of men.42

The life of Dickinson's first President was not a happy one. Besides financial worries, the responsibility of teaching the hardy sons of the American frontier, who were mainly interested in quick degrees, was onerous for the Scottish minister, accustomed as he was to Old World respect for learning. Even more difficult was living in a community where "the people expect to get good by their

Nisbet to James Duncan, Nov. 8, 1803.
 Nisbet to the Board of Trustees, Oct. 18, 1802.
 Nisbet to Young, June 9, 1792.

ministers tho' they seldom pay them or hear them," and where radical ideas were prevalent. 43

An examination of some of the political history of the early years of Dickinson's existence and Nisbet's tenure as President of the institution will reveal sharply the cleavage between College and community. In the year in which the College graduated its first class, the convention in Philadelphia finished its work on a new instrument of government. The Constitution of the United States was not well received along the frontier. The people of that area were especially jealous of local rights and fearful of strong central government. They were worried, also, because the original draft of the constitution contained no bill of individual rights.

On December 26, 1787, a public meeting was called in Carlisle to express agreement with Pennsylvania's ratification. A cannon was placed in the public square, which was to be fired off for each of the ratifying states. The foes of the Constitution broke up the meeting. The cannon was spiked. Instead of the planned celebration, the figure of Thomas McKean, Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court and ardent supporter of the Constitution, was burned in effigy. The issue had been clearly drawn and succeeding events, the French Revolution, the Whiskey Rebellion, the election of Jefferson, were to widen the gulf between the democratic frontier and the friends of a strong national government who cared less for freedom than for what they considered to be law and order.

<sup>43</sup> Nisbet to Young, Jan. 8, 1790.

Nisbet was on the side of law and order. The rights of man, the idea of equality, offended his religious and political beliefs alike. This he made very plain to his students of the history of philosophy. "The French," he said in one of his lectures, "have done all in their power to make all things appear equal . . . to release the vicious from all fear of punishment," and, he continued, "it would be easy to show that modern fashionable philosophy [by which he meant the ideas of Paine, Jefferson, and the French Revolutionaries] is entirely composed of the drops and dregs of those of the ancients." 44 Some of the students, Taney noted in his memoirs, although they were required to reproduce the exact words of the lecturer in their notebooks. refused to take this sort of thing down. The student from whose notebook the above is quoted wrote at the top of the page, "lecture 62, and last, I hope."

Dr. Nisbet's ideas began to make life in Carlisle uncomfortable and even physically dangerous for him during the period after the levying of the excise tax on whiskey in 1791. In the years that immediately followed the adoption of Hamilton's tax, the people of Carlisle sympathized strongly with the Whiskey Rebellion which the tax incited in western Pennsylvania. They sympathized also with the French Revolutionary armies. Nisbet was violently opposed to both movements. As he did not keep his ideas to himself, either in teaching or in preaching at the Presbyterian Church, there is little wonder he was forced to write that although he was "in very much anxiety for the peace

<sup>44</sup> These remarks are recorded in the notebook of an unknown student in 1795, now preserved in the Dickinson College Library.

of this poor country . . . I believe that my neighbors reckon me as an enemy to it." 45

The fall of 1794 was a period of disorderly expression of sympathy for the Whiskey boys. In July of that year Nisbet had bitterly reported:

The majesty of the sovereign people have arisen in a mass, in the counties of Washington, Allegheny, Westmoreland and Bedford, and being animated with the purest principles of Liberty, lately imported from France by the Democratical Society, they have resolved to resist Congress and the excise act, and to destroy all its abettors by fire, rapine, and massacre and other constitutional methods common in republics, having begun their campaign with burning the house, barn and fences of General Neville, since which time they have prevented the publication of the Pittsburgh Gazette, in order to show their zeal for the liberty of the press, and the Revolutionary Convention next appointed a committee of public safety for robbing the post at Greensburgh which was executed immediately.46

The Whiskey Rebellion had begun.

On September 8, a liberty pole was erected in the Carlisle square proclaiming "no excise." Colonel Blaine, one of the town's first citizens, was attacked by the adherents of the rebellion and was pursued for two miles out of town. The Sunday preceding the erection of the liberty pole Nisbet had preached a sermon urging support of the Federal government. This infuriated the whiskey sympathizers. A group of them determined to assault his house,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Nisbet to Young, March 25, 1794. <sup>46</sup> Nisbet to Young, July 29, 1794.

but finally refrained "only from a regard to an invalid member of his family." <sup>47</sup> Perhaps they might not have been so considerate had they seen the description of their cause quoted above.

The next month George Washington passed through the town on his way to suppress the rebellion. His reception as he rode into town to review his troops was interesting. A newspaper account in the Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser for October 7, 1794, reported: "the crowds were assembled in the streets, but their admiration was silent." 48 One might speculate that the silent admiration was caused by awe, but one might also recall the events of the previous month. Nisbet, by the way, felt that the whole affair was "something ridiculous." Washington's neutral attitude toward France irked him. And "that our government which has given so unequivocal and so public an approbation to the cause of the French Revolutionists should be obliged by the law of self-preservation to take arms against their fellow-citizens for acting on those very principles which they have so often approved" seemed to him a kind of poetic justice. He hoped that it "might teach . . . that the custom of flattering the people as sovereign is a natural cause of sedition and insurrections." 49

That the Washington administration had countenanced the French Revolution even for a moment may have bothered Nisbet, but the community in which he lived and struggled to keep alive his infant College, felt quite differ-

49 Nisbet to Ashbel Green, Oct. 14, 1794.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Wing, op. cit., 110. <sup>48</sup> Lenore E. Flower, Visit of President George Washington to Carlisle (Carlisle, 932).

ently. On May 22, 1793, a news item appeared in Kline's Gazette stating that interested citizens should meet at the home of James Pollock to send an address to Citizen Genet. minister from the French Republic.50

About a week later another item appeared in the paper.

Yesterday evening a subscription was opened in this borough, for the benevolent purpose of aiding the distressed friends of freedom in the Republic of France. In the course of a few hours upwards of 80 barrels of flour were subscribed. 'Tis hoped this measure will meet the approbation of every good citizen, and that similar exertions will be made in every part of the state, to afford relief to a people whose blood and treasure have been liberally expended in the establishment of the independence of this country.51

This measure did not meet the approbation of Dr. Nisbet, who wrote in June, "a subscription is going on here for the support of the French and the people are eager to contribute in order to show their contempt for the President's proclamation." 52

Throughout the summer the flour subscription continued. The Gazette gave some eight additional items concerning it. One reveals that the idea was receiving support in the surrounding countryside. At a meeting held during the summer at Silver Springs Meeting House, it was resolved unanimously, "that we will concur with the inhabitants of this county in procuring and raising money and wheat toward the relief of the said citizens of France." 53

Thompson, op. cit., 17, citing Kline's Gazette, May 22, 1793. Ibid., 17-18, quoting Kline's Gazette, May 29, 1793. Nisbet to Young, June 1, 1793.

Thompson, op. cit., 18, quoting Kline's Gazette, Aug. 23, 1793.

Kline's busy press turned out a number of broadsides in this period supporting the drive.

The inhabitants of Carlisle also engaged in less practical but even more enthusiastic demonstrations of their feeling. December 26, 1792, the following item appeared in the paper:

On Thursday last the bells rung in this town with short intervals from 3 o'clock until 9 in the evening. At night the courthouse was elegantly illuminated. Two beautiful transparencies were displayed from the upper windows of the courthouse with the following inscriptions in large letters which could be seen at a great distance—the one to the east significant to the event then celebrated [evidently the declaration of the French Republic September 22, 1792, news of which had reached this country only a short time before this celebration took place] being in that quarter—Let Man Be Free. The other was to the south intimating that despotism prevails most in that unfortunate hemisphere—Tyranny Is About To Cease. Bonfires accompanied the illuminations and the evening was passed by the citizens in convivial meetings expressive of their satisfaction.<sup>54</sup>

There is little wonder, then, that Nisbet became convinced that the terrible heresies of liberty and equality had been firmly planted in the town of Carlisle. The townspeople generally, as has been seen in the description of their reaction to the Whiskey Rebellion, were equally convinced that Nisbet was not their kind of man. It is interesting to speculate upon the fact that when the mob was dissuaded

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 17, quoting Kline's Gazette, Dec. 26, 1792.

### A FRONTIER EXPERIMENT

from burning the college in Brackenridge's story, it next thought of burning the church. "'It is not our intention to abolish Christianity,' said one of the mob, . . . 'but to put down the preacher at this place, who is not an American Republican.'" 55 Nisbet certainly was not. He was a Scotchman with strong anti-democratic leanings.

The local political ideas show a marked coloring of Jeffersonian hue. This can be seen in the support given Jeffersonian candidates, and in the kind of candidates who ran for office. Brackenridge may not have been describing actual incidents, but his story of the politician hard pressed to explain the fact that he was seen carrying two books certainly could have occurred in Carlisle. Nisbet gives an account of an actual election in which appeared the new kind of candidate for "public honors," as elective offices were called by the minority accustomed to holding them in the eighteenth century.

This is our election day [he wrote in 1794] in which all free citizens of the several sections of the municipality are to exercise the inestimable right and privilege of electing each a four-thousandth part of a delegate in Congress. . . . A shoemaker, who is our sheriff, is the candidate for Congress set up by the Sovereign People on the merit of having conducted their mobs and deliberations and liberty pole meetings with consummate judgement and exemplary decency. . . . It may be expected that he will know what laws are suitable to his constituents as he has often taken the measure of their feet for many years past. 56

<sup>55</sup> Brackenridge, op. cit., Part II, I, 51.

Nisbet may not have liked these things but they are evidence of one of the great facts of American history. The events in France and the activities of Jefferson's political lieutenants brought about a revolution among the American masses, especially along the frontier. Americans, like their English forebears, had been accustomed to acting with some degree of political freedom, but always with proper deference to their betters: clergymen, lawyers, and other educated or wealthy members of society. In the closing years of the eighteenth century they became aware, however, that they really had political power. They naturally grew impatient with the old order and its representatives. The candidate who was accused of being seen with two books and who boasted, "I am an illiterate man, God be praised, and free from the sin of learning," may well have been real-may have been, in fact, the shoemaker of Nisbet's letter.

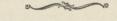
These eventful years of our history were years of struggle for the young College in Carlisle. By 1803 some progress was being made: a college building had been successfully subscribed for and even a heart-breaking fire could not prevent its ultimate completion in 1805. The difficulties of the earlier years can be ascribed to two causes. The frontier community in which the College was located did not take enthusiastically to higher education. Despite his devoted efforts to maintain academic standards and recruit new students, Charles Nisbet was not a leader whom the people of Carlisle could easily follow. A man who could ask "how long a just and holy God may permit the

# A FRONTIER EXPERIMENT

world to be desolated by the fire of liberty and equality," <sup>57</sup> could hardly expect to raise money from the still-keepers of the Cumberland Valley in 1794 or keep their sons attentively at work copying his lectures.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Nisbet to Young, Feb. 13, 1795.

# THE SOURCES OF THE ORIGINAL DICKINSON COLLEGE LIBRARY \*



James W. Phillips

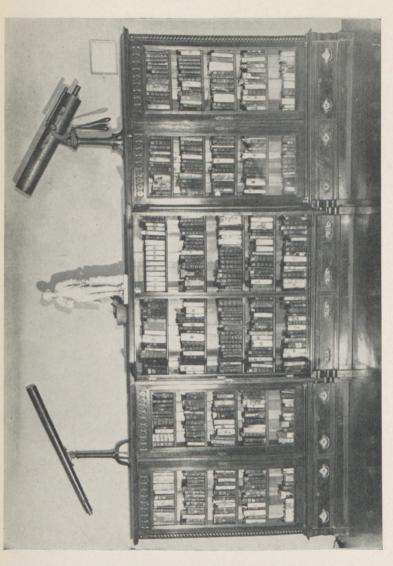
FORMERLY CURATOR OF DICKINSONIANA
DICKINSON COLLEGE

That the granting of the charter to Dickinson College in 1783, the College fathers began immediately to assemble a library for the new institution. Although the assembling of the book collection was often as discouraging as the accumulation of a working capital, General John Armstrong, president pro tem of the Board of Trustees, could announce in 1787 that "the library already consists of two thousand seven hundred and six volumes, in the Hebrew, Latin, English, French, German, Low Dutch and Italian languages, the donations of gentlemen in England, Scotland and Philadelphia." 1

Although this statement is the earliest discovered description of the College book collection, it is singularly noncommittal, for it serves only to reveal the physical

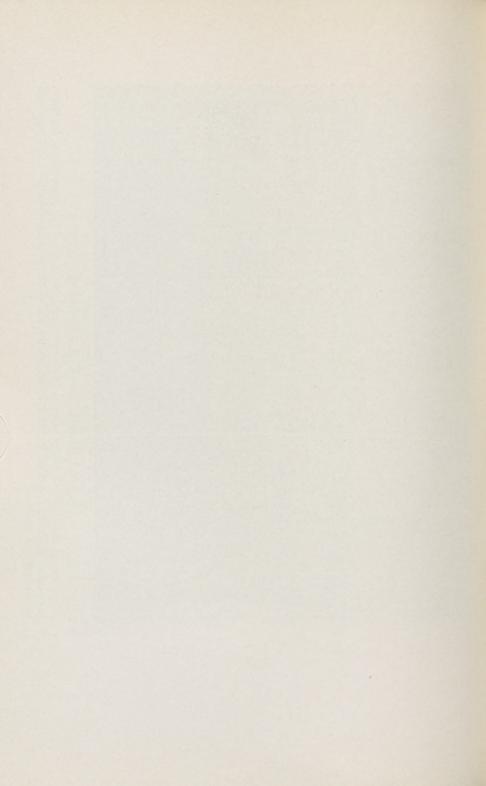
<sup>1</sup> Statement on the inside cover of the February 1787 number of the Columbian Magazine.

<sup>\*</sup>Read before the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association at Reading, Pa., October 25-26, 1946; originally published in Pennsylvania History, XIV (1947) 108-117; and reprinted here with the permission of the editor.



# BOOKS FROM JOHN DICKINSON'S LIBRARY

A portion of the original College Library, as now preserved in the Boyd Lee Spahr Room for Dickinsoniana. With the statue of Joseph Priestley on the top of the case are Priestley's telescopes and his mortar and pestle.



### ORIGINAL DICKINSON COLLEGE LIBRARY

book content of the library and to establish the geographical identity of its benefactors. Since neither contemporary manuscript nor printed catalogue is available to expand this bare information, it is necessary to turn to manuscript sources and to examine the remaining volumes in order to discover the origins and subject content of the original library and the efforts expended in collecting it.

Physical examination of the volumes gradually discloses the identity of the library's donors. Most of them had divulged their identites to previous searchers, for James Ross, the first librarian, and Dr. Benjamin Rush had carefully inscribed in many of the volumes the donor's name. Therefore, from the cartographical profiles of General Armstrong's statement, the gentlemen in England emerged as Granville Sharp, Dr. John Coakley Lettsom and Dr. Richard Price; in Scotland, as Dr. John Erskine; in Philadelphia as John Dickinson, Dr. Benjamin Rush, Richard Peters, Jr., William Marshall, Samuel Vaughan, Robert Bell, William and David Hall, Thomas Bradford, William Young, Francis Bailey and Thomas Dobson. The examination also revealed donors who may be generally but somewhat questionably classified as Pennsylvanians, i.e., Dr. Samuel McCoskry, Robert Magaw, Samuel Tate and James Baxter.

The advantage of this identification in analyzing the sources of the library are many, but the loss, since 1787, of almost seven hundred books from the original collection inevitably means the loss of the identity of certain donors and this loss creates a certain inadequacy in any evaluation of the original sources. However, those donors identified

present a sufficiently varied cross-section of interest in the educational project of the founders to provide a summary study of the collection.

Manuscript search indicates the extent of the trustees' effort in acquiring the library. William Bingham from England in August 1783 wrote an optimistic report of the possibilities of English assistance. He summarized his view of the situation:

Policy dictating the Necessity of Cultivating a Great commercial connection with the United States, has in View the immediate Advantage to be derived therefrom—thus far we may place Dependence, on their professional Attachment.<sup>2</sup>

Bingham's actual solicitation of help for the new College was extremely disappointing. He wrote his fellow-trustees of his failure in December 1783. "They [the English] have invariably informed me that no Success could now be expected in this Undertaking." <sup>3</sup>

This discouraging news did not decrease the pursuit of assistance from the British Isles. The trustees tried various sources. A letter to Dr. Charles Nisbet, soliciting his acceptance of the presidency of the new school, also suggested to Dr. Nisbet the importance of his securing books for the library. Dr. Benjamin Rush, the leader of the College trustees, investigated the possibility of aid from his English humanitarian friends. He wrote Dr. John Coakley Lettsom and requested the Quaker physician to beg a few books among his friends.

Trustees to Nisbet, Carlisle, Pa., Sept. 29, 1784, Dickinson College Library.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Bingham to John Montgomery, Aug. 10, 1783, Dickinson College Library.

<sup>8</sup> Bingham to Trustees of Dickinson College, Dec. 20, 1783, Dickinson College Library.

### ORIGINAL DICKINSON COLLEGE LIBRARY

The Sweepings of their Studies will be very acceptable in our illiterate wooden country. The Lumber of the Stalls in the Streets of London, which are sold by weight, would make us truly rich.<sup>5</sup>

Although these efforts to obtain British help were not fruitless, the Philadelphia area yielded Dr. Rush and his colleagues their principal reward. This reward came from John Dickinson, whose interest in his proposed school across the Susquehanna Dr. Rush had stimulated. This stimulation resulted in Dickinson's gift of approximately fifteen hundred volumes from the library of his father-in-law, Isaac Norris, the younger.

These volumes formed an excellent nucleus for a college library. They represented certainly the scholarly and bibliophilic interests of two, and possibly of three men—Isaac Norris, the elder; Isaac Norris, the younger; and possibly James Logan, the intimate friend of the elder, and the father-in-law of the younger Isaac Norris. The library of the two Norris' reflected at least sixty years of continuous extensive intellectual activity and concomitant collecting. Letters of Isaac Norris, the elder, give evidence of his interest in and ability to evaluate books. In 1707 he wrote to Joseph Pike concerning a book entitled *The Rights of the Christian Church*:

The book is four hundred and sixteen pages, showing original and natural lights of government upon Sidney and Locke's principles, and that 'tis absurd and inconsistent with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Rush to Lettsom, Philadelphia, April 8, 1785, T. J. Pettigrew, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the late John Coakley Lettsom (2v., London, 1817) II, 426-427.

the very being of a government to have two independent powers in the same society; that the clergy's endeavoring at it, is upon Papal principles and inconsistent with the Christian religion, with much more. . . . 6

Writing to James Logan in 1710, he discussed completely different publications:

I received per Charles Read, the Anno 1709, also the second volume of the Tatler, which I am pleased with. I should have ovelooked them . . . had not thou recommended them, and by that taught me to find instruction as well as delight. Turning them over, as one is apt to do at first opening, by letting the leaves fly from under my right thumb, I stopped at last in the second volume, No. 114, and read it, and that directing me back to No. 95, I was more than ordinarily taken with them. . . . 7

The senior Norris' book-collecting proclivity is perhaps reflected in those items of the College collection which were formerly in the libraries of Sir Robert Clayton, onetime Lord Mayor of London, of Gilbert Burnet, Lord Bishop of Salisbury, and of Robert Uvedale, English schoolmaster and horticulturist. The libraries of these English collectors were sold by booksellers during the elder Norris' lifetime and were probably bought by either himself, his son, or his friend, James Logan, on one of their several visits to London.

After the death of his father in 1735, Isaac Norris, the younger, continued to add to the library. His niece, Mrs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Correspondence between William Penn and James Logan (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Memoirs, X, 1870) II, 210-211. 7 Ibid., 432.

### ORIGINAL DICKINSON COLLEGE LIBRARY

Deborah Logan, in an account of the physical library at Fairhill, described the manner in which the collection was housed at this time:

It [the library] was placed in a low building, consisting of several rooms, in the garden, and was a most delightful retreat for contemplative study; the windows curtained with ivy; the sound of 'bees' industrious murmur' from a glass hive which had a communication from without, and where their wonderful instinct could be viewed. Beautiful specimens of the fine arts and many curiosities were also collected there, the shelves were filled with the best authors, and material for writing and drawing were at hand.<sup>8</sup>

The most interesting items in the College collection, which Norris, the younger, added to the library during his lifetime, are those purchased from the library of Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford. The greater part of these books Norris purchased in 1752 from Thomas Osborne, a London bookseller, to whom the widow of Edward Harley, Robert Harley's son, sold the library. Norris indicated in a letter to Osborne on March 16, 1752, that he had, prior to the writing, purchased some Harleian items from a New York bookseller but that he had found these volumes in unsatisfactory condition. Desiring to secure items in better condition, he included in the same letter a list of titles from the Harleian catalogue of May 1749, which he wished to buy. At the same time he wrote to Richard Partridge and requested him to check on the condition of the titles he

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Charles J. Stillé, Life and Times of John Dickinson, 1732-1808 (Philadelphia, 1891) 312.

ordered.9 The existing Harleian items in the Norris collection are of some bibliographic and bibliophilic interest. They are witnesses to the skill of the bookbinders Thomas Elliott and Christopher Chapman. They are bound in calf, morocco and Russian leather, with the characteristic gilt border. One volume bears the name of Robert Harley stamped in gilt on its cover.

Most of the books purchased by the younger Norris contain the bookplate designed for Norris by James Turner. Turner, an early American engraver, migrated from Boston to Philadelphia around 1746 and worked there until his death in 1769.10 The plate is of Chippendale design and confronts, in addition to the plate of Harley, that of the Duke of Newcastle, Earl of Leicester, John, Lord Bishop of Ossory, Sir Philip Sydenham and Peter Dobroe, from whose collection Norris purchased items and added to his own.

Only coincidental evidence corroborates Stille's statement that Norris the younger inherited from James Logan, his father-in-law, a library of extraordinary value. 11 At least the remaining Norris items in the College library do not confirm this fact, unless those books containing a note in Norris' hand "rebound in 1751" were among the bequest of Logan to his son-in-law. The collection, it seems, reflects Logan's intellectual and bibliophilic interests rather than any of his actual holdings. Cannon in The American Book Collector writes of Logan's interest in Aldine im-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Wallpaper Letter Book, 1735-1755, 72, Logan Papers, Historical Society of

<sup>10</sup> William Dunlap, History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States (new ed., 3v., Boston, 1918) III, 339.

11 Stillé, op. cit., 316.

### ORIGINAL DICKINSON COLLEGE LIBRARY

prints.<sup>12</sup> The Norris collection contains some late examples of that press. Later Logan felt the price commanded by an Aldine press book to be exorbitant and collected items from the press of the Estienne's. There are titles in the Norris collection representing the press work of each printer of the Estienne dynasty. The subject matter of the books is also identical, both libraries containing titles by Flamsteed, Bellarmine, Halley, Boyle, Wallis, and others. The collection, it seems, discloses the close mental and social relationship existing between the two families rather than the actual gift of volumes from one to the other.

Of the fifteen hundred volumes from the Norris collection originally presented Dickinson College, 555 identified items remain. There are 1052 unidentified volumes, belonging to the original library, the greater part of which were probably included in Dickinson's gift. At least certain common bibliographic features point in that direction, such as similarity of subject matter and manuscript marginalia, provenience and style of binding. The identified Norris volumes cover the subject fields of medicine, science, law, religion, history, philosophy, language and belles lettres. In addition to Estienne and Aldine imprints, the collection contains examples from the presses of Elzevir, Gryphius, Plantin, Froben and John Day. Fortytwo of the titles are listed in Pollard and Redgrave's Short-title Catalogue of English Books, 1475-1640. This collection formed a surprisingly plausible nucleus for a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Carl L. Cannon, American Book Collectors and Collecting from Colonial Times to the Present (New York, 1941), 32.

college library, especially so, when one considers the absence of conscious scholarly intent in the assembling of the collection.

Judge Richard Peters added to the nucleus formed by the Norris collection with a gift of fifty titles. Volume Nine of the Peters Papers in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania contains a list of the Peters gift. However, only seventeen of the forty extant Peters items agree with the titles listed. It would seem from this disparity that Judge Peters either changed his mind concerning the titles or gave to the library on more than one occasion. These books are principally of interest because of their provenience. Among them are items from the library of his uncle, Richard Peters, secretary of the Province. Of the elder Peters' books, one contains a note of presentation from James Logan.

Dr. Benjamin Rush not only solicited gifts for the library but was also one of its donors. Sixteen titles in the collection testify to his generosity. Among the books are several of his own works, which he inscribed "from the author to Dickinson College." There is also a four-volume set of Norton's *Remarks*, bearing the bookplate of the high priest of the American Tories, Jonathan Boucher.

The remaining identified donors in the area of Philadelphia were principally booksellers and printers. Of first importance in the number of extant items is the gift of Robert Bell, one-time employer of Thomas Paine and printer of Paine's Common Sense. The Bell gift, of which twelve titles exist, include several items from his own press, among which is an edition of Thompson's The Sea-

### ORIGINAL DICKINSON COLLEGE LIBRARY

sons, Philadelphia, 1777. Five volumes represent the interest of Thomas Dobson, publisher of the American Encyclopædia. William and David Hall, sons of Franklin's partner, David Hall, were also among the library's benefactors. Eight volumes give evidence of their aid. Two beautiful examples of the Foulis' press, a Homer and a Callimachus, were included in the Hall gift. Thomas Bradford, William Young, Francis Bailey, James Baxter, Robert Magaw, William Marshall, Dr. Samuel McCoskry, Samuel Vaughan and Samuel Tate complete the list of American donors. The contributions of these benefactors vary from one to ten items.

Dr. Rush's correspondence with the English humanitarians resulted in gifts from Granville Sharp, Dr. John Coakley Lettsom and Dr. Richard Price. From attributable items, Granville Sharp was the most benevolent. Letters from Sharp to Dr. Rush indicate that Sharp added to the book collection on at least two occasions. In July, 1784, he wrote:

My Friend Mr. Fisher of Philadelphia has been so obliging as to take charge of a Box of Books which I have addressed to your care for the public Library at Carlisle. The Books consist of the Writings of my Grandfather & Father, together with my own . . . to them I have added an interlined Hebrew & Greek Bible, which will be useful to Students of Divinity. <sup>13</sup>

Again in the fall of 1785, Dr. Rush received a letter from Sharp concerning a shipment of books.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Sharp to Rush, July 10, 1784, Rush Mss., XXVIII, 91, Library Company of Philadelphia.

The Collection of Books [sent] consist partly of old Books which I purchased from the Catalogue of my Bookseller, such as I supposed must be useful to a public Library, and partly of Old Editions of Books, which I obtained at a low Price because I picked them out of the Refuse of his Shop, which were not Catalogued; for otherwise (to tell you the truth) I could not have afforded to send you so many. But inferior priced Books are sent agreeable to your Desire signified in your 2 last kind Letters of 5 April and 5 June, to send you the Sweepings of Libraries, & indeed I have no other mode of obtaining even Sweepings, but by Purchase.

I was careful however to send none but Books of some Character & Authority, & especially Law Books; because I was informed that Law Books are at this time in great Request in America.<sup>14</sup>

Forty-five items of Sharp's gift remain in the collection. Among them are several of Sharp's own works: A Declaration of the People's Natural Right to Share in Legislature (2d ed. London, 1775) and A Tract on the Law of Nature and Principles of Action in Man (London, 1777). The "sweepings of Libraries" also include six items from the library of Narcissus Luttrell, celebrated English collector of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. No information exists to disclose Sharp's source for these items—perhaps the bookseller, perhaps a friend.

As his letters indicate, Sharp gave some consideration—as much as money would allow—to his selection of titles. The American preoccupation with state-making no doubt prompted his decision concerning the need of law books.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Sharp to Rush, Sept. 29, 1785, Rush Mss., XXVIII, 92.

### ORIGINAL DICKINSON COLLEGE LIBRARY

His interest in American education, however, was not new, for at an earlier date he had presented books to the libraries of Harvard and Brown Colleges.

The two other identified English donors, Dr. Lettsom and Dr. Richard Price, are represented by thirty and three volumes respectively. Dr. Lettsom's gift consists of a thirty-volume set of the Journal of the House of Commons. It is also possible that he gave other titles. At least this is vaguely implied in his letter to Dr. Rush in July, 1785. It is probable that these books were of a legal nature, for the Quaker physician emphasized the need of such books in the same manner as Granville Sharp. Dr. Richard Price gave a three-volume set of Hoadly's works. The existing books and a letter to Dr. Rush corroborate this gift. If he gave more volumes to the library, they have disappeared.

The Scottish benefactor, Dr. John Erskine, long evinced interest in America. Volumes in the libraries of Harvard and Yale Universities witness this interest. The Erskine gift to Dickinson College was probably the result of his friendship with Dr. Charles Nisbet, the College's first President and a fellow minister in Scotland of Dr. Erskine. Seventeen items, chiefly religious tracts in the German language, remain from the Erskine donation. A typical title among these remaining volumes is Velthusen, *Predi-*

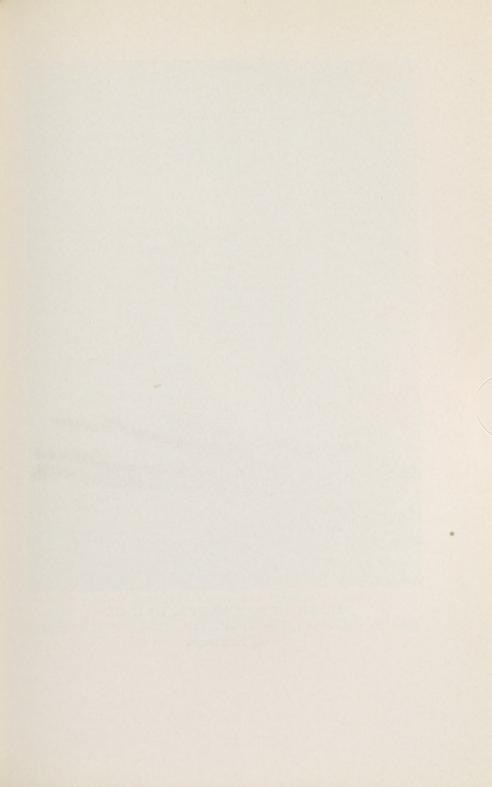
gen, Homilien und Reden, Leipzig, 1783.

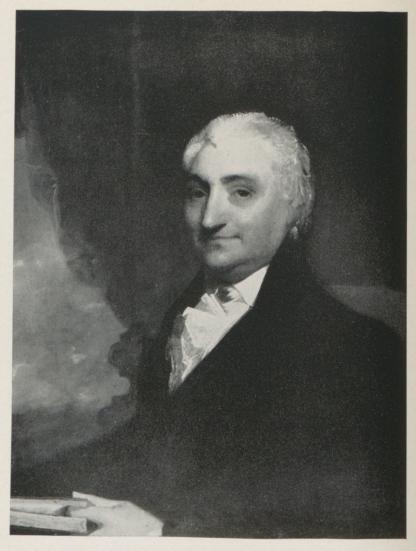
The remains of the original collection total 2026 volumes, 680 items less than stated in the Columbian

Lettsom to Rush, July 1785, Rush Mss., XXVIII, 8.
 Price to Rush, Jan. 1, 1783, Rush Mss., XLI, 11.

Magazine announcement. These volumes include 1052 unidentified English and continental imprints prior to 1800, and seventy American imprints of the same period. No pertinent information exists concerning the donations other than the statements of purposeful selection by Granville Sharp and Dr. John Coakley Lettsom. Many unquestionably gave books as books. The printers and booksellers gave of their stock-in-trade, and it would not be at all surprising to discover that some of the titles given by them were those that were selling very slowly. The Norris collection, while containing items of interest and value to a scholar, was filled with many medical treatises and polemical volumes, which were of little use to the student. The conclusions of Shores in his book The Origins of the American College Library are equally true of the original Dickinson College Library.17 The library came into "tangible existence" upon John Dickinson's presentation of the Norris books; the collection did not make up in quality what it lacked in quantity; and the foundation of literary society libraries—the earliest at Dickinson College was founded in 1791—was tacit criticism of the usefulness of the original library. Despite this criticism, which may not be completely void of the prejudice of vantage point, the Dickinson College Library in 1787 compared favorably in statistics and in subject matter with the libraries of the older colleges at that day.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Louis Shores, Origins of the American College Library, 1638-1800 (New York, 1935) 226-232.





HUGH HENRY BRACKENRIDGE
From the original by Gilbert Stuart in the collection of the University of Pittsburgh.

HOW WE GOT "OLD WEST" \*



William W. Edel
THE PRESIDENT OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

CHARLES NISBET arrived in Carlisle on the Fourth of July in the year 1785, and took the oath of office as the first Principal of Dickinson College on the day following. He found in Carlisle a college in the process of organization, housed in a tiny brick building, fronting on a narrow and muddy alley. This building had been erected by the trustees of the Grammar School in 1773, and consisted of a two-story house thirty feet by twenty-three in size, with only one room fitted out for teaching. The principal of the Grammar School and first member of the College faculty was James Ross, of whom it was said that he taught nothing but Latin and Greek, "but taught them better, perhaps, than they have ever been taught on this continent." Thirty or forty unruly "boys," all but a handful of them pupils in the Grammar School, were the turbulent student body occupying the single crowded schoolroom.

<sup>\*</sup> The Boyd Lee Spahr Lecture delivered at Dickinson College on February 24, 1950.

The town in which the College was located was a frontier trading post and militia headquarters, a staging point on the Great Road to Fort Bedford and Pittsburgh over which passed the never-ending stream of pioneers and settlers moving out to the winning of the Ohio country and the West.

Ten days after his arrival Nisbet wrote Benjamin Rush: "The low state of your funds and the present condition of this country fill me with alarm," and in this first letter he gave as his judgment on the adequacy of the College building a perfectly devastating comment: "I am persuaded that nothing can be done with the boys here while they occupy the present school."

Rush had already been planning to secure more satisfactory quarters for the College. In his correspondence with Nisbet, in an effort to persuade the Scottish scholar to accept the election as principal of the new College, he had held out the hope that the College would be able to secure the Public Works, which had been erected near the Borough of Carlisle as a military headquarters and which, with the conclusion of hostilities, were not in use. When the trustees of the College first met in Carlisle, on April 6, 1784, a committee was appointed to negotiate with the proper parties for the purchase of the Public Works. This proposal failed, and although many subsequent attempts were made to accomplish the same result, each effort, however promising, was also doomed to failure. At one time Dr. Nisbet himself was permitted to occupy a section of one of the buildings of the Works but it was never possible for the College to move to that location.

The tiny Grammar School building on Liberty Alley was enlarged by the addition of a stone section which doubled its size and on December 20, 1786, the trustees announced that their building was situated in "a pleasant part of the town," was sixty feet long by twenty-three broad, and contained three large rooms for the purpose of teaching, plus a library room and an apartment for the physical apparatus. From 1786 until 1805 this structure, part brick and part stone, was the "house" of Dickinson College.

The need for better quarters was immediately recognized and was a frequent subject for discussion not only in the meetings of the trustees but in the voluminous correspondence of Dr. Nisbet himself. Nisbet and the trustees did not see eye to eye on this subject, as on many others, and the irascible Scot expressed his views with pungent forthrightness. At one time he addressed a letter to Rush from "the Tomb of Dickinson College." The provision of a new building was talked about, plans were laid, committees appointed, sites discussed, and hopes aroused; but dwindling finances erected an impassable barrier and the efforts fell to the ground. Yet Nisbet urged that no additional students could be secured until better accommodations were provided and at last, after more than a dozen years of hampered teaching in the crowded old building, in April 1798 yet another committee was appointed to select a proper site for a new and larger structure, to prepare plans thereof and to make an estimate of the expense that would be entailed. This committee reported in April 1799 and the board of trustees, having viewed the site chosen by the committee, accepted the report and authorized the purchase of the site and the construction of a new building.

The site chosen was the present John Dickinson campus, containing a little more than seven acres. As early as April 22, 1799, the work of preparing the ground for the construction of the building was begun, although the actual purchase of the property from the Penns was not consummated until July 25, 1799, as the original deed in the possession of the College testifies.

On June 20 in the same year, still before the deed was signed, the trustees, professors and students of the College went in procession from the old building to the spot on the present John Dickinson Campus where West College now stands, and there the cornerstone of the new edifice of Dickinson College was laid. To John Montgomery, Esq., one of the first trustees and one of the most zealous supporters of the College, went the honor of laying the first stone. The foundation of which that cornerstone was a part is under West College today.

The "New Edifice" of Dickinson College rose slowly, for funds were hard to come by and subscriptions were scanty. But with determination and persistence the trustees continued with the construction and in 1801 the building was roofed over and protected from the elements. However, yet another year was to pass before the building was completed and in use.

At the meeting of the board of trustees on December 3, 1802, the board authorized a public statement on the condition of the College, and announced that the trustees

"have at great expense and trouble nearly completed a large, elegant and commodious building in which the classes are taught." In the following weeks the building was completed and three rooms furnished, and by the first of January, 1803, the structure was in use. Somewhat smaller than the present West College, it was constructed of brick and contained twelve rooms. Nothing is known of its plan or its external appearance, except that it was "ornamental, elegant and noble."

After seventeen years Charles Nisbet had brought the College from Liberty Alley to its present location at the western edge of Carlisle. In the sixty-seventh year of his age he could now take his ease and contemplate the "large, elegant and commodious building" which gave a home to the College to which he had given a startlingly intense and effective intellectual life.

But, alas, it was not so to be!

John Montgomery gives the best account of what happened one month later on February 3, 1803, in a letter in which emotion overrides spelling, punctuation and grammar. In one headlong sentence he writes to Benjamin Rush:

We had got three rooms finished in the new Building and were occopayed by the student about 4 or 5 weeks very comfortably the Building was neerly finished had a grand appearence was ornamentale and elegent had twelve large apartments but as all things were uncertain in this world and that our joys and Comforts and not be compleat or parment that noble fine house was yesterday redusced to ashes by accidence occasioned by putting hot ashes in the seller about 11 o'clock

a voulant snowstorm from the west attended with a strong bold wind had blowen sparks to shevaing or other stuff and not being discovered in time the whole Building was instantly in flames and thus my friend after all our trouble and exspence in erecting an elegent and comfortable house for Dickinson College our hopes were blasted in a few minutes my eies beheld the distroying flames with an achening that I need not tell you how feel on this meloncoley occasing you will know them by your owen feelings this has happened at an unfortunate time.

In the face of this crushing disaster the resolute men who had founded the College dropped their differences and dissensions and with heroic courage, while the embers yet smoked, they decided immediately to rebuild. They had fought for the life of the College against public indifference and amid the tumultuous distractions of a frontier village, they had borne through twenty years the heavy burdens of its mounting debts, but the eyes that beheld the destroying flames with an "achening" that could not be told saw also the needs of the future, and before six weeks had passed they had organized their plans for rebuilding, had appointed their building committee, taken public subscriptions in Carlisle, authorized the employment of an overseer, arranged for a public viewing of "such Plans as may be procured," and had called upon all subscribers to remit one-fourth of their subscriptions on or before the first of May.

Within the next few weeks agents were dispatched to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Frederick, Hanover, Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Richmond,

Petersburgh and Norfolk to collect funds. In the archives of the College are many of the subscription lists dating from this time, among them one made up by Judge James Hamilton in the City of Washington, containing subscriptions from President Jefferson, Vice-President Burr, Chief Justice Marshall, five members of Jefferson's Cabinet, four members of the Supreme Court, the French Minister, the Spanish Ambassador, and many others in important positions at the new seat of government.

The current of events moved at a precipitous pace. On May 2, 1803, a committee was appointed with Dr. Armstrong and Judge Hamilton as members for the purpose of securing an architect who would prepare the plans for the new building. Between that date and the twelfth of the month Judge Hamilton must have written a letter to Judge Hugh H. Brackenridge, who was then sitting in Circuit Court at Easton, Pennsylvania. Hamilton's letter has been lost, but the reply of Brackenridge, long unknown, was recently discovered among the papers of the late Professor Charles Francis Himes and turned over to the College by his granddaughter, Miss Mary Himes Vale. From this letter and two others discovered at the same time can be reconstructed with complete certainty, the story of the origin of that magnificent structure which has stood on the center of the Dickinson Campus for a century and a half and has been loved by thousands of Dickinsonians under the affectionate title of "Old West." But before we can tell the story we must introduce the characters.

The main actor in our story is the celebrated Judge Hugh Henry Brackenridge, who had become a trustee of the College in the early part of 1803. The judge was renowned alike in politics, literature and the law, had served as an army chaplain during the Revolution and had practised law for twenty turbulent years in Pittsburgh. As a truculent and combative Jeffersonian Republican he had fought the Federalists on the stump, in the press, and, it was suspected, by condoning if not abetting the Whiskey Rebellion.

He had been a school teacher at fifteen, a classmate of James Madison at Princeton, so cogent a debater and so ready a writer that he conducted a profitable business as an undergraduate by being one of the first American "ghost writers" for his classmates who had orations to prepare. Trained for the ministry, he soon parted company with Piety and gave his allegiance instead to her blindfolded sister. His ideas on family life were unique, as were his ideas on nearly every other subject. While he apparently loved his first wife, he never mentioned her given name. He married his second wife on impulse, asking her father for her hand within an hour of his first meeting with her. He taught his oldest son his letters at the age of two, and when he was seven sent him from Pittsburgh to New Orleans with strangers that he might become proficient in French.

Brackenridge himself once said that the distinguishing characteristic of a man was a taste for the fine arts, and in the midst of his crowded life on the frontier his indefatigable pen was ever busy. He wrote sermons, essays, pamphlets, epic poems, political invective, law commentaries and the first great American frontier novel. By this

satirical novel, Modern Chivalry, he holds a place in the history of American literature as the writer of one of the minor literary classics of our early days. The tale is Quixotic in type, with an American, Captain Farrago, and his "foot-boy" Teague O'Regan taking the place of the immortal Don and Sancho Panza. The novel appeared in sections from the version in verse in 1788 to the final collected edition in 1815, and it has been re-edited and re-issued from time to time since that day, with the most recent edition by Claude Milton Newlin in 1937. In the opinion of this editor, Brackenridge "produced the most vigorous American book of his time and the most penetrating commentary on American Democracy in the making."

As might be expected, Judge Brackenridge was a man of vast contradictions. Defeated in his attempts for office, he was appointed a Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in 1799 and served with a degree of competence until his death in 1816. He was tall, "bent in the shoulders," with a facetious turn of humor that was often at variance with his judicial functions. Careless in dress, often owning only one suit of clothes and no stockings, he was not above kicking off his boots while on the bench and delivering his charge to the jury with bare feet propped on the bar of justice. Once he was seen riding naked through the rain, with his one suit of clothes folded under the saddle, for, he explained, "the storm, you know, would spoil the clothes, but it couldn't spoil me." Yet this same backwoods political philosopher wrote commentaries on Blackstone, entertained Philippe Égalité in his home, and was of sufficient stir in the world to have his portrait painted by Gilbert Stuart. Years afterward, as his son examined a witness in court, the witness said to him, "Young man, I knew your father well; he was a gentleman."

It was such a rich and diverse personality who came to Carlisle to live in 1801, and made, in his own way, a contribution to Dickinson College that has never been exceeded in the century and a half since.

The second actor in the story is Benjamin Henry Latrobe, who brought with him when he came to this country a thorough training in both architecture and engineering, experience gained in England and Germany, an abiding love for classic forms in architecture, a gracious and engaging personality and the spark of genius. It has been said that the date of his landing in Norfolk, Virginia, March 20, 1796, is one of the significant dates in American cultural history, for the genius of Latrobe probably had more effect in setting the style of public architecture in this country than that of any other man. He is remembered for the early colonnaded designs of the Capitol at Washington, for the Cathedral at Baltimore, the Philadelphia Bank Building, the Philadelphia Waterworks, St. John's Church in Washington, the exterior of the Virginia State Capitol, and many other structures of great merit. Indeed, go to Constitution Avenue and the Mall at Washington, and si eius monumentum requiris, circumspice!

Before Latrobe had been in America two years he had been entertained by Washington at Mount Vernon, had become a fast friend and collaborator of Jefferson, and was constantly seen in the company of Bushrod Washing-

ton and James Madison. In 1798 he came to Philadelphia and, hearing of a contest for the design of a bank building soon to be constructed, laid a hastily sketched freehand plan on his host's desk, and later found that he had been awarded the commission. From that sketch came the Philadelphia Bank Building, no longer standing, always considered by him to be his best work, and a milestone in American architecture. Early in May, 1803, the distinguished architect and engineer was living in Philadelphia, but within a few days he would set out for the Federal City, for he had but recently been appointed Surveyor of the United States Buildings at Washington, and he must needs consult with Jefferson about his duties.

So much for the actors. The time is the first week in May, and the scene covers a triangle that takes in nearly a quarter of the State of Pennsylvania, with its corners at Carlisle, Easton and Philadelphia, the connecting roads more than three hundred miles of unpaved wilderness trail, up valleys, over mountains, past settlements in the clearings with inns about every dozen miles for change of horses and for "board and bait."

Judge Hamilton sands his ink at his desk in Carlisle. Judge Brackenridge sits in his Circuit Court at Easton. Mr. Latrobe prepares to pack his portmanteau in Philadelphia and gathers up his plans for Washington.

The letter which Judge Hamilton has sanded and sealed must have been written at the instance of his entire committee, as that committee had been specifically charged with the duty of securing an architect for the new building. It must also have been bulky in size for it contained "rough sketches of the several plans projected at Carlisle for Dickinson College," for we find Judge Brackenridge later laying these sketches on Benjamin Latrobe's drawing table. No record remains of the dispatch of this letter to Brackenridge at Easton, but in that day when there were few regular mail schedules, we may be sure that some chance traveller, setting out from Carlisle by way of Harris' Ferry, Lebanon and the Reading road to Easton, stuffed the letter into his saddlebags and earned a couple of shillings by delivering it to the Justice presiding at the Circuit Court of Northampton County. The committee to secure the architect had been appointed on May 2, the committee had met, Judge Hamilton had written his letter, the letter had journeyed across 120 miles of frontier, and Judge Brackenridge had it in his hands on May 11!

Fortunately the hands were the hands of Hugh Brackenridge, who was as precipitate as he was sagacious. Whether Hamilton had told him of Latrobe's presence in Philadelphia, or whether we may credit Brackenridge himself with the first suggestion of that distinguished name as the possible architect for the building, it is impossible at this date to determine, but his letter to Hamilton of May 19, 1803, gives some ground for inference that the idea was Brackenridge's own. At any rate, he acted, and without delay.

To a judge like Hugh Brackenridge, it meant nothing to adjourn court to handle important personal affairs, so he swept the docket clean, banged his gavel and shouted for his horse. It would have been late in the afternoon when the bulky letter from Hamilton had been delivered to him, and by crack o'dawn he would have been in the

saddle. Across the silence of a century and a half, if you listen, you can hear in imagination the echoing hoofbeats of that slashing ride, for Hugh Brackenridge was off for Philadelphia at a pounding gallop—in his own words, "with the speed of an express." He had to catch Latrobe.

In these days speed has so fantastically accelerated that it is difficult for us to think ourselves back into the time when man's criterion of swiftness was the speed of a running horse. In 1803 "the speed of an express" meant exactly the speed of an express rider, mounted on the best of horseflesh, riding at breakneck pace for the delivery of despatches, changing horses every dozen miles, at the ordinaries spaced at equal intervals along the road. The Pony Express across the western plains sixty years later set up records as high as eighteen miles per hour, maintained over many hours, but the speed of an express through the forests and hills of frontier Pennsylvania was generally reckoned at fifteen miles per hour. No coach could meet that speed: those roads were not paved for wheels.

Pounding out of Easton in the fresh May morning Hugh Brackenridge crossed the Lehigh River by Martin's Ferry and put the horse's head to the stage road leading down the Delaware. He settled into the saddle for the grueling trip ahead of him. He was an old hand at this; had he not racked back and forth along every trail between Princeton and Pittsburgh; had he not found a wife, indeed, as he stopped to take a stirrup-cup at a farmer's house one rainy day? But that was long ago, and his sons were grown, and the years sat heavily upon that tall frame with its bent

shoulders, but he urged his horse on as the morning grew warmer.

The gallop was a steady beat as he passed Durham Furnace, and the old glass works, fording the shallow creek with a shower of flying spray. Through the shaded forest he went, now out into rough clearings, where settlers looked up from their plowing to wave to the galloping passer-by, into the forest again, up over rising hills, with the river glinting in the sunglare off to the left, down the sloping trail at a hand-gallop, until his horse's hide turned black with sweat and flecks of foam flew where leather and horsehair touched, then straining up other rising ground and on until man and beast alike were happy to see the first sprawling tavern, the rude log ordinary where there were rest and refreshment. The Judge swung out of the saddle and called for drink, while a hostler pulled the saddle from the blowing horse and carried it over to a fresh horse waiting at the hitching post. Almost before the girth had been buckled, the Judge was striding through the inn door, ready to mount and be off. As the hostler gave him the reins and turned to care for the horse that had galloped in from Easton, there was a scurry of hoofs on the gravel and then the rhythmic galloping hoofbeats started out along the road to Philadelphia.

Now the road left the Delaware and turned in toward the southern foothills of the South Mountain, with steeper hills and the road in the valleys deeply rutted by the heavy freight wagons, and the footing treacherous for the flying steed. The woods were denser here, with larger clearings in the valleys and here and there a bearded Moravian settler

and his half-grown boys at work in the fields. This new horse was not so good in the gait as the one he had brought from Easton, and the Judge rode with a little less ease, but his body was well forward in the saddle and he pressed relentlessly on.

The pace slowed a little on the hills, and dropped to a walk on the last hundred yards of the hill overlooking Ottsville. He stopped for a breathing space on the hilltop, looking out over the rolling hills bluing into the distance in the north and west, and south over the more open land across the Tohickon and toward Doylestown. A moment later he leaned forward and kicked a heel and was off down the steep road. Here he passed a convoy of freight wagons skewing sideways down the hill with the teamsters yelling and the brakes shrieking on the steel wheel-rims. The laden wagons carried produce for Philadelphia, but he would ride up the High Street a full day before they would reach it. He splashed down into the shallows of the ford near Ottsville, lifting his feet high as the horse breasted the deeper water of Tohickon Creek. He changed horses at the inn beyond the ford, and was off again with his mind busy with the arguments he would present to Mr. Latrobe when he caught him-if he caught him.

Under the high sun he rode down across the more open country, with its rich farmland and many streams. The road was well tended for many stretches, for this was the main stage route out of Philadelphia for the north through the Wind Gap in the Blue Mountains. But his horse was blowing and laboring before he came into Doylestown, with its half a hundred houses and the Fountain Inn on

the square. It was early for dinner, but he sat long enough to eat what the landlord brought and drink a cup. Near thirty-five miles lay behind him, and the twenty-five that were ahead would be ridden under the midday sun. It seemed unseasonably hot for May and the shade of the trees beside the fifty-year-old inn lay like a pool of coolness around the hitching racks. But a sense of urgency was on him and he left the shade behind, looked to his saddlebags and tried the girth, then put a foot in the stirrup and vaulted into the saddle.

Three miles out of Doylestown the pounding gallop of his horse's hoofs echoed across the new bridge over the Big Neshaminy, and he was half-way to Horsham when he passed the diligence, rocking in its straps as it bowled along over the uneven road. He made a hurried mental calculation; since sun-up he had made about twice as many miles as the stage and another two hours would put him in Philadelphia. Would Mr. Benjamin Latrobe still be there?

As he passed through Horsham a "raising bee" was in progress, with a crowd of Quaker farmers raising the timbers of their new Meeting House with block and tackle. But he could not stop to lend a hand as he had done so many times at barn-raisings in the western counties.

At the Sign of the Wagon in Willow Grove he changed for the last time, mounting his fifth horse since breakfast in his lodgings in Easton. The last twelve miles were through more settled country and the roads were more used. Farmers driving their produce in to the markets thought him a despatch rider as he overtook them, but as he galloped by the glimpse of his white hair and deter-

mined face set them wondering what he might be about. He went down the highroad through Germantown, and past the high white-pillared Logan house where John Dickinson had lived. The horse dropped into a canter and as the houses of the city grew thicker about them, slowed into a trot. It was with a feeling of relief that the judge turned into the High Street and put his back to the sun. He had come near sixty miles by the road, and it was not yet three of the clock.

Brackenridge made his way to the door of Mr. Benjamin Latrobe's residence and there found that gentleman completing his preparations for a prolonged stay in Washington. The architect listened gravely to the Judge's story: Yes, he had heard of the tragic burning of Dickinson College, following so closely on the burning of Princeton College, and his eyes lighted as Judge Brackenridge told him that Jefferson and Madison had already made contributions to the rebuilding of the College, and that Bushrod Washington had added his contribution also. He agreed that all good citizens should endeavor with whatever strength they possessed to promote the education and civilization of the society in which they and their children were to live. Because he conceived it his duty to assist in such a worthy undertaking, he would be glad to accord the Judge a forenoon of his time, say on the morrow, in which he might discuss the proper type of building to be erected for a college for young men. Judge Brackenridge bowed his thanks and retired, made his way to an inn and slept the clock around.

In the morning the Judge laid before the celebrated

architect a packet of papers containing pencil sketches for the proposed replacement of the burned building of Dickinson College. Mr. Latrobe spread the papers out, then queried his visitor about the town of Carlisle, the layout of its streets, the contour of the College lot, its situation, the climate, the building materials available in the area, and the resources of the College for the proposed construction. Turning these matters over in his mind he pondered for a while and then looked up.

In that moment Hugh Brackenridge's ride from Easton to Philadelphia paid its ultimate dividends.

Mr. Benjamin Latrobe, recently appointed by Thomas Jefferson as the Surveyor of the United States Buildings at Washington, agreed to prepare plans for the new building of Dickinson College and deferred his proposed trip to Washington for several days in order to give his immediate attention to the project. In the following seven days he was busy at the drawing table and his desk, sketching, calculating, laying out, projecting elevations and perspectives, consulting his library, designing façade and trim. At the end of that time he brought out plans and elevations for a building of such surpassing dignity and proportion as to set it forever among the great examples of early American architecture.

While Benjamin Latrobe was busy with the designing of the building we now know as West College, Judge Brackenridge mounted his horse again and rode out the Trenton road and turned off to New Town, then the county seat of Bucks County, where he convened the Circuit Court and cleared its docket. Upon his return he waited upon the

architect again, and after examining the plans and discussing them in detail he gave them his unqualified approval. That night, May 19, 1803, he sat down to report to Judge Hamilton in Carlisle how he had carried out the commission that Judge Hamilton's committee had laid upon him. The letter he wrote, vellowed with age, with its flowing handwriting rushing impetuously across the paper, is now in the Dickinsoniana Collection in the Boyd Lee Spahr Room in Bosler Hall. With his letter, when he forwarded it, he sent an eight-page letter, in Latrobe's own hand. written on a beautiful laid linen foolscap, in which the great architect gave a full and carefully reasoned explanation of the functional basis for the building he had drawn. In this letter Latrobe, with a graciousness matched only by his genius as a builder, gave his services as an architect, including plans, elevations and detailed working drawings, freely and without cost. O priceless gift!

We will let Judge Brackenridge speak in his own words.

# May 19. 1803. Philad?

Sir. From Easton on the delaware came with the speed of an express, to this city with a view to see the celebrated Mr Latrobe who was said to be about to set out from this his place of residence & to be absent some time. Had the good luck to find him at home, and having waited on him laid before him rough sketches of the several plans projected at Carlisle for Dickinson College, explained the situation of the ground, and town, streets etc. and probable fund for the building.

Having left him near a week ago, and I have this after-

noon again seen him, having in the meantime been from the city, at the Circuit court of Bucks County.

He will forward by the mail addressed to you plans of the building to the best of his skill, & has delivered me a letter prepared in fact for the trustees, though addressed to me, explaining his ideas on the Subject. The plan has been projected after much reflection on his part, with any assistance I could give as to collateral explanations & is fully approved of by me, if that is of any consequence or will contribute to Satisfy you as to the expediency of adopting it, in any degree.

I write in haste but will be at home in two weeks from the time you receive this; and will almost immediately return and obtain working draughts and such farther instructions as may be necessary.

It is Mr Latrobe's decided opinion, & it is now mine that the building be of Stone; that the basement story of the old building be used; and that it be, of course, on the Scite or foundation of the old. This will save expence, but if the thing was new, it is the place. In the center one way, and above 2/3 in depth; & on a ground some what rising.

# Yours

H H Brackenridge

You will see that Mr Latrobe contributes gratis exclusive of Clerks hire, the advantage of his skill in architecture which is noble & deserves the gratitude of the public.

The Latrobe letter, long lost and but recently recovered, confirms with final and irrefutable proof the tradition that West College was designed by the man who designed the National Capitol and the Baltimore Cathedral. It, too, is in the Boyd Lee Spahr Room at Dickinson College.

Philadelphia, May 18th. 1803.

Dear Sir

You will herewith receive the designs for Dickinson College which I promised you. In forming them, I have endeavored to take all the circumstances which you stated to me into consideration, and to do the best for you that they would permit. I will beg leave to state to you the principles which have governed me in the distribution, & arrangement of the apartments.

The two aspects, the most unpleasant in our climate are the North East & the North West. The extreme cold of the North West winds in winter, & their dryness, which causes a rapid evaporation, so thoroughly chills the walls of every house, exposed to them, that when the wind, as is almost always the case, changes afterwards to the West & S. W. & becomes warmer & moister, the water is precipitated upon the walls, from the air, by their coldness, as upon the outside of a glass of cold water in warm weather,-and they soon stream with humidity. The North East bring along rain & sleet,-and their violence drives the moisture into every wall of which the material will permit it. The unpleasantness of the winds is aggravated by the suddenness with which the Northwest commonly succeeds the North East. I have stated these things, which are indeed known to everybody, in order to explain a law, which is thereby imposed upon the architecture of our Country: It is,-to reserve the Southern aspects of every building in the erection of which the choice is free, for the inhabited apartments, and to occupy the Northern aspects by communications, as Stairs, Lobbies, Halls, Vestibules etc.

This Law governs the designs herewith presented to you. On the North are the Vestibule & Lobbies, or passages. They protect the Southern rooms from the effect of the Northern winds. On this Aspect I have also placed the dining room, a room only occasionally occupied for a short time,—& the School rooms above it,—which by means of Stoves, & the concourse of Students are easily kept warm. There are indeed two Chambers in the N.E. wing on each story.—If these Chambers be inhabited by Preceptors, the one as a study, the other as a Bedchamber, the disadvantages of the Aspect must be overcome by such means, of Curtains & Carpets, as a Student does not so easily acquire. The south Front affords on each story 6 rooms for Students. The angle rooms will accommodate 3, and each of the other, 2 Students; in all 14 on each floor.

The Hall is intended to occupy two stories. Above the Hall a room of equal size may be appropriated to a Library, or may furnish 4 or 6 Students rooms, 2 or 3 to the South and as many to the North.—

The usual mode of planning colleges, by arranging the rooms on each side of a long passage, has many disadvantages,—the chief of which are the noise, & the necessary darkness of the Passage, and the bad aspect of one half of the rooms.—These inconveniences do not, I believe exist in the plan I present to you, & should at a future period, the celebrity of your institution encrease the number of your students, as it no doubt will,—it will be better to erect new accommodations, than to obtain room by connecting the wings, in order to save expence; as has often been done.—

In respect to material,—I would, certainly, recommend that you should build your external walls of the lime stone of your Valley, rather than of brick. The internal Walls, may with more advantage be built of brick.—It will be objected that Limestone is so pervious to Water, that no

Plaistering will stand upon it.—I do not know that it is more so than common brick, but if it were, I must observe, than no material whatsoever, unless the wall be 2 f 6 i thick will prevent the damp appearance of the Walls towards the North aspects, unless they be battened & plaistered upon Lath. By battens are meant strips of 11/2 inches thick & about 2 inches wide, which are fastened by Wallhooks, upright to the Walls, at the distance of 15 inches from each other, & upon which laths are nailed as upon framed work. No such precaution is necessary upon the internal walls. The air thus enclosed between the Plaistering upon Laths, & the solid Walls being a non conductor, prevents either the Heat or the cold of the external wall from materially affecting the temperature of the room, and the Plaistering itself will always be dry.-This method has also the advantage that the plaistering on the external Walls is easily made fair & straight,-whereas the roughness & irregularity of a stone Wall, is not easily got over by plaistering.

I have said thus much in order to give the Trustees an opportunity,—should they adopt the plan proposed,—of procuring their principal materials at once.—But should they contemplate to carry it into execution either with or without alteration, I shall expect that you will have the goodness to apprise me of their resolution in the course of this month, that I may furnish such working plans as will be immediately necessary.—

I beg leave also to suggest to you and to the Trustees,—that it will be impossible to conduct your building with success, oeconomy, & satisfaction, unless some intelligent, experienced, & honest man,—as superintendant of the Work, have controul over every part of it.— This situation is often given to some respectable, but superannuated Workman,

from motives of benevolence. Such a superintendant is indeed adequate to the counting of bricks, the measurement of stone & lime, the keeping an account, & often to the decission on the quality of the materials & the goodness of the Workmanship. But those things though necessary,—are not all that are wanted. The great & useful business of a Superintendant,—or as he is commonly called, a Clerk of the Works, consists in so directing & combining the Labors of a variety of Workmen, that they shall all produce the building, without loss of time or waste of material, or dispute among themselves, or disadvantage in the performance of their contracts, by want of material, or the Necessity of waiting for each other. Such an office requires vigor of mind & body, as well as mechanical knowledge & manual skill, and whether you may meet with a person capable of filling it, the liberality or oeconomy of compensation will in part determine. I do not think you will get a fit man under from 12 to 15 Dollars per Weeke.— We pay here 18 Dollars at the public works.

I beg to repeat what I before mentioned to you,—that as I conceive it to be the interest & duty of every good citizen to promote,—quoad virile, the education, and civilization of the Society in which he & his children are to live, I will with pleasure contribute to the reestablishment of Dickinson College, every possible gratuitous personal assistance:—and should you accept of this part of contribution,—nothing will be charged against you but such actual expenses as may arise in the course of my giving it to you.

I am with true respect,

Yours truly
B Henry Latrobe
Surveyor of the U.States

buildings at Washington

Philadelphia May 18th 1803

I must request that you will excuse the evident marks of haste in this letter, which would have been more explanatory, had not the time to which you have limited me, been so short.

Three days after Judge Brackenridge made his first report to the committee on the selection of an architect, he wrote again to the chairman of that committee, giving further details of his later conferences with Latrobe. This letter, in its handwriting, gives even more evidence of haste than the Judge's first report of three days earlier. Brackenridge's comments are interesting for many reasons, two of which are his quaint comment on the pigeon lofts and his pointed observation on the defects of Nassau Hall. Here is his letter:

Philad. May 22 - 1803

Sir.

Latrobe the architect is decisively for Stone as the materials of the College building. Bricks <sup>1</sup> will rust as well as bricks and have the appearance of age. But this, in either, is with him no objection. He says Painters in their drawings give even new buildings, the rust of Antiquity, To make them venerable; and in large buildings, and of a public nature it is especially becoming.

But as to materials, he prefers Stone, as proper for a large

Edifice giving it the Appearance of Strength.

You will see his plan which is in my opinion an improvement of that suggested by ourselves, and his reasons prevail with me as to throwing the entry to the North. In that the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Brackenridge in his haste wrote "bricks" twice. He obviously intended one of these words to be "stone."

main front will be turned away from the main street, and the necessaries two, will be in a range with the center of the building respectible of one and half story. The upper part may be used for pigeons. They may be placed at the distance of 50 or 75 feet the  $\frac{1}{3}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the length of the edifice from it, and covered from the View or at least obscured by a clump of Trees.

He has convinced me that a basement story of 6 feet above ground is necessary to give proportion to the elevation of the building and to give a proper elevation. In that case with the advantage of 4 or 5 feet under ground, the Stewarts Apartments dining room etc. will be in the basement story and supersede the necessity of other buildings.

The defect of the Princeton basement story is the not being more than 2 or 3 feet above ground. It is too much a Cellar, which produces Damp. He is in favour of sheet iron for a rooff the expense of which is \( \frac{1}{3} \) more than Shingles.

As the building need not be completed but gradually, the outward walls & the rooff first, these ought to be of the first consideration, and leave the expence of the whole out of the question. Trust to future occasion for the whole.

Impressed with a strong Sense of the importance of the plan which never can be mended, I have taken all pains to serve the institution in this particular.

If the plan of Mr Latrobe is adopted, he will furnish working plans to the utmost minuteness which will be of great advantage.

I will be at home by the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, and assist with any advice it may be in my power to give.

Verso: Yours.

James Hamilton H H Brackenridge

At Carlisle Pennsylvania.

These three letters, here published for the first time, throw a clear spotlight on the events of early May, 1803, and show how the College secured the services of Benjamin Latrobe, "unquestionably the first architect of the age." They also provide the information which explains one of the minor mysteries of the building of West College: how the services of Latrobe were secured when Benjamin Rush. living in Philadelphia, strenuously opposed the replacement of the burned edifice with a larger building. This was Hugh Brackenridge's contribution, made possible by his headlong ride from Easton and the aggressive forthrightness with which he espoused Latrobe's design. His letters to Hamilton served to offset Rush's objections and the building committee of Carlisle trustees, with Latrobe's plans in hand, chose to build greatly for the future. They accepted from the drawing table of the great architect the plans and elevations for a building which, however lovely it might appear on paper, would come to its ultimate loveliness only when translated into the warm limestone of the Cumberland Valley and mellowed by the storms and suns of the succeeding years.

So important was this action of the building committee that their names should be recorded here: Charles Mc-Clure, William Alexander, Samuel Postlethwaite, Col. John Montgomery, Judge James Hamilton, John Creigh, a Mr. Steel, Dr. James Armstrong, Dr. Samuel McCoskry, and Charles Smith, the last three, with Judge Hamilton, being the sub-committee on selection of the architect.

John Montgomery, then treasurer of the College, took a strong stand in favor of Latrobe's plans, and we find him

writing in June, 1803, to Benjamin Rush as follows (in part):

Carlisle, Pa.

Sir,

We have got a plan of a house, drawn by Mr. Henry Lathrob, plain and simple, roomy and convenient, and will have an elegant appearance, four story to be build with stone. We are providing material, and expect to have the house in considerable forwardness this fall....I am much pleased with the present plan, as it will be large, elegant, comfortable and not expensive, and will not cost more than about two <sup>2</sup> dollars more than the late house would have cost when finished.

The corner-stone of the New College was laid on August 8, 1803. In accordance with Latrobe's instructions, this building was placed exactly upon the site of the destroyed one, utilizing such parts of the foundation of that structure as had not been damaged by the fire. Limestone from the quarries at Newville was brought to the site, with red sandstone for trim from York County, and the walls of the building rose slowly. More than a year later the building was roofed over and protected from the elements, but it was not until November 4, 1805, that the building was first used for classes. The structure was known as the New College until 1836, when the building of East College resulted in a change of the name to "West College," now affectionately shortened to "Old West."

The original drawings of the building, as they came from the famous architect, have long since disappeared,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Montgomery evidently meant "two thousand dollars."

save as they are embodied in the stone walls and brick partitions of the ivy-clad building as it now stands. But when the building was young, before it was surrounded with trees and covered with ivy, Alexander Brackenridge, the son of Judge Hugh Brackenridge, entered the College as a student, graduating as a classmate of James Buchanan in the Class of 1809. From a drawing made by Alexander Brackenridge an engraver who signed himself "B. Tanner, F.S.A.fc." produced a plate showing the building as it must have looked between 1805 and 1810. This, the first known picture of West College, was published in *The Port Folio* in its issue of March, 1811.

The sketch made by Alexander Brackenridge showed the New College with its cupola complete and the mermaid in place. The cupola, with its octagonal base, probably was suggested to Benjamin Latrobe by the illustration of the Tower of the Winds which appeared in Vitruvius' De Architectura, a copy of which was in his library. The illustration shows the temple built in Athens by Andronicus of Cyrrhus, with its octagonal base, columns and dome, and with the dome surmounted by a weathervane in the form of a Triton who curled his tail up behind him and pointed with a wand to the direction from which the wind was blowing. Two early representations of the cupola lend credence to this, as Alexander Brackenridge's sketch of 1811 and a water-color by Daniel Dinkle dated about 1840 each show a mermaid with a single pointing arm. Later this one-armed mermaid was replaced by the two-armed mermaid who has through the years added a

gay and quizzical touch to the serene and stately beauty of West College.

In November 1949, in the home of Mrs. J. F. C. Latrobe, Jr., the author of this paper, in company with Professor Paul F. Norton, of the Pennsylvania State College, turned the pages of one of the sketch books of Benjamin Latrobe. As we turned to a page dated in 1819 we found a pencil drawing of Harris' Ferry, showing the high water of that year. En route to Pittsburgh, Latrobe had crossed the Susquehanna at Harris' Ferry and followed the road down the Cumberland Valley, the first trip he had ever made down that valley. And on that trip he had passed through Carlisle, seeing for the first time the beautiful building he had planned sixteen years earlier. He stopped there long enough to take out his sketch book, for there in our hands, on the page facing the drawing of Harris' Ferry, was a lovely drawing, in the clean and sure pencil style of the great architect, a drawing which by some incredible mischance had never before been identified. There, under date of 1819, serene and quiet and stately, fresh from the pencil of Benjamin Henry Latrobe himself, with the contours of the North Mountain indicated in the distance, was Old West.

As early as August 1803, when the building existed as yet only on paper, the editor of the *Carlisle Gazette*, who had seen the perspectives, said these prophetic words concerning it: "Simplicity and adaptation to the purposes of the Institution are its excellence. As a public building it will do honor to Pennsylvania."

There is reason to believe that Latrobe always felt West

College to be one of his most pleasing buildings. In one place he lists it among the three structures, the building of which has given him the most satisfaction. It stands today just as it came from his drawing board, with no significant external alterations, and it is perhaps the only one of his buildings still standing of which this can be said. Many of his works have been destroyed in the passage of a century and a half, many have been altered and overbuilt until they would scarcely be recognized as the products of his genius, many have been degraded to unfitting uses, but West College stands on the Dickinson campus today exactly as the master-architect planned it, serving the purpose for which it was designed, mellowing with age and growing lovelier with the decades. It has been said that the genius of Latrobe lay in "simplicity and perfect proportion." No words more fittingly describe the magnificent classic structure, one of the foremost architectural monuments of the early Republic, which to generations of Dickinsonians has represented the dignity and stability of the College.

# THE EDUCATION OF ROGER B. TANEY \*



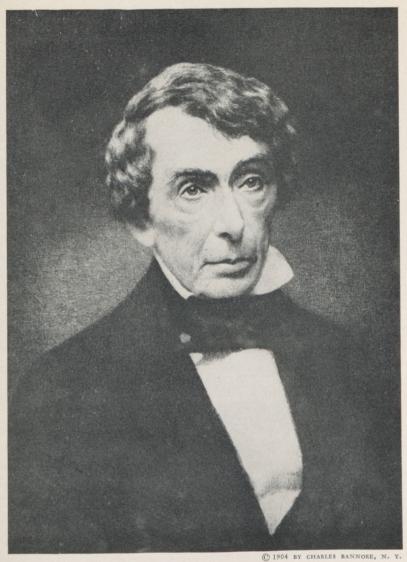
# Carl Brent Swisher

THOMAS P. STRAND PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

One of the more rewarding and delightful preoccupations of scholars is that of searching for the gold of universal wisdom in the annals of the lives of great men. We are met on this occasion to gather flecks of human richness from the career of Roger B. Taney, lawyer, statesman and Chief Justice, and particularly from the records of his college years, which were formative years not only for him but for his College as well. The selection of this topic, it is freely admitted, was governed in part by the fact that it was Dickinson College, a newly established institution in the allegedly swampy wilds of south central Pennsylvania, at which were laid the intellectual foundations of Taney's professional career.

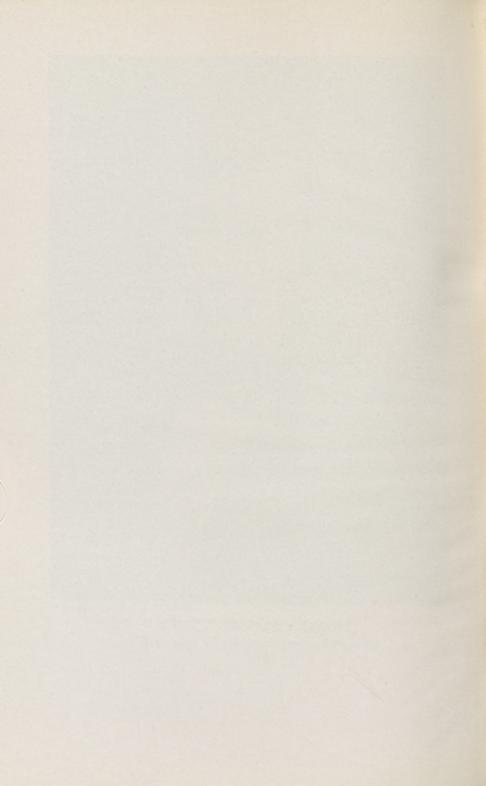
It was true of Taney's education, of course, as of the education of all of us, that it began long before his arrival at college gates—long before the day in 1792 when a wagon hired in Baltimore completed a trip over rough

<sup>\*</sup> The Boyd Lee Spahr Lecture delivered at Dickinson College on April 1, 1949.



DOCED BROOKE TANEV

ROGER BROOKE TANEY
From an interpretive etching by James S. King.



roads to deliver the boy of fifteen and a fellow student from Calvert County in southern Maryland into the charge of Dr. Charles Nisbet, head of the College. Indeed, the stream of influence upon Taney's life can be traced back over a period of more than a century to 1660 when his great, great grandfather, Michael Taney, arrived in the new world as an indentured servant, to work his way into freedom, into the ownership of land and slaves, and into membership in the newly established landed aristocracy of southern Maryland. In the Taney family and in the families with which the Tanevs intermarried, as in most pioneer groups, the challenge of frontier life released new energies. With demonstration of ability to survive and prosper in a new world came a new sense of power. With entrenchment among the "best people" of the community and the mingling with them of family blood came a sense of assurance and a consciousness of prestige which went far beyond the measure of mere external achievement.

Important also in the educational background of Roger Taney is the fact that at some stage his Maryland ancestors, originally members of the Church of England, became members of the Catholic Church. The significance of this fact does not derive merely from the intrinsic differences between the two churches, matters which we do not here attempt to discuss. It derives rather from the peculiar position of Catholics in Maryland during the period in question. While they were not persecuted in the American colonies as they were in other parts of the world, they did meet with discrimination. In Maryland they were deprived

of political rights, their privileges of worship were limited, and the maintenance of Catholic schools was forbidden. Among the effects were greater emphasis on worship in the home and closer association among Catholics generally. The fact that most of the aristocracy of southern Maryland was Catholic meant identification of aristocracy and religion in the community with independence and isolation from people at large. Any such concentration intensifies life within the group and increases the impact of group activities and sentiments upon the individual. His outlook and reactions are molded all the more completely because of it, or else he is driven to rebellion.

There was in Roger Taney no visible promise of rebellion at the time of his arrival in Carlisle. His temperament may have been pliable enough during his early years to permit a considerable degree of regimentation. It may also have been true that he was subject to much less in the way of regimentation than earlier generations of his family had been. In any event, it is a matter of history that one year before his birth in 1777 the American colonies declared themselves independent and the state of Maryland adopted a constitution which guaranteed freedom of religion. His vigorous, hot-tempered, and opinionated father, the fifth in the American line of Michael Taneys, became a member of the Maryland legislature, and in that and other ways participated in the political life of the new state which called itself the "Free State of Maryland." The period, therefore, may well have been one of rapid release of pent-up energies and one of great hopefulness, even as the economic hard times of the post-Revolutionary period made it impossible for Michael Taney to send his sons abroad for education, as his own father had done and as he himself had hoped to do.

Of the several members of the Taney family the education of the eldest son, Michael, the last of the line to bear the name, constituted no serious problem; Michael was to inherit the family home and the family plantation and carry on the family tradition and perpetuate the family name. The education of the daughters was likewise deemed not a serious problem, for daughters were expected to marry and merge their lives with men of other names. For Roger Taney and his two younger brothers, the matter was more serious. Since there were no plantations for their inheritance, and since they were members of one of the leading families in their community, they must be educated for the practice of a profession.

There is little evidence to show why Michael Taney, Sr., after giving his son Roger such education as could be provided by local schools and tutorial arrangements, decided to send him to Dickinson College. Some of the negative reasons are relatively clear. On financial grounds and because of changes in the school itself, it seemed inadvisable or impossible to utilize the school in Belgium which Michael Taney himself had attended. The financial factor was similarly relevant to any other European institution. There was no satisfactory Catholic college in the United States. St. John's College, at Annapolis, for which Michael Taney was seeking state support, lacked either the prestige or the quality for fulfillment of his purpose. In the light of this near-vacuum of desirable possibilities it is not sur-

prising that the Taneys were attracted by reports that two other families in their own county were sending their sons to Dickinson College in Carlisle. Presumably also they had heard something of the vigorous intellectual leadership of Dr. Nisbet. In the light of our current knowledge of what leads boys to choose one college rather than another, it seems quite possible that the desire of Roger Taney to follow the path of a boyhood chum may have provided the basic motivation.

However that may be, in the autumn of 1792 Roger Taney and a friend boarded a merchant schooner which lightly blowing winds delivered a week later in the harbor of Baltimore. After the delay necessary for finding a wagon to transport them and their trunks to Carlisle, they set out on the cross-country drive. Taney was delivered in due time into the charge of Dr. Nisbet and was lodged in the home of the teacher of mathematics, where lived seven others of the total of sixty-five students. Here he lived for three years a normal boy's life in a normal if intellectually turbulent boys' college, playing an intellectually vigorous boy's part, and closing his college career as valedictorian of his class.

For an audience at Dickinson College it would involve unnecessary and perhaps tiresome repetition if this account were to deal at length with the establishment of the College, with the characteristics and activities of its principal founder, Dr. Benjamin Rush, and with those of Dr. Nisbet, who gave character and vitality and tone to the institution. Another speaker in this series has discussed the career of Dr. Rush, utilizing the Rush manuscripts in

Philadelphia which include pungent, vigorous and illuminating letters from Dr. Nisbet about the College and its problems. From them we learn of Dr. Nisbet's scornful attitude toward the town, his conviction that it was not only swampy and muddy and inadequately equipped for student residence but unhealthy and characterized by immorality which might corrupt the students. We know of his outspoken impatience with what he regarded as the gross crudeness of democracy as practiced in the community and in the United States at large. We know of Dr. Rush's concern about Dr. Nisbet's caustic comments and his fear that they might drive democratic funds away from the College and his canny remark that tuition fees were neither Federalist nor Republican.

These, however, were not the important factors in the situation as far as Roger Taney and his fellow students were concerned. The relevant factors were Nisbet's deep interest in the students, his rich learning, his dislike of sham and pretense and shoddiness of every kind, and his ability to capture the imaginations of students and bring out in them the potentialities for distinction which they possessed. Certain it is that Taney derived value unmeasured from the hours spent in the Nisbet home talking with and listening to the brilliant conversation of this man of intellect and learning who had the capacity of imparting unobstrusively to immature students much of the richness of his own culture. Other teachers also played their rou-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Such interest is revealed in a letter from President Nisbet to young Taney's father, dated Feb. 6, 1792, in the Dickinson College Library, quoted in Boyd Lee Spahr, "Charles Nisbet, Portrait in Miniature," supra, p. 67.

tine parts but they were largely overshadowed by the distinguished head of the institution.

Important also in Taney's education was the smallness and intimacy of the student body and the vigor and aggressiveness of the two literary societies, the Belles Lettres and the Union Philosophical, between which most of the students were divided. Debates were hotly fought contests. They dealt as a rule not with minor matters of local and ephemeral interest but with some of the major philosophical problems of the time, and, indeed, of all time. They stretched youthful imaginations in terms of great ideas. As shown by extracts from the minutes of the Belles Lettres Literary Society, the subject of the first debate in which young Taney participated was: "Whether war or peace is most natural to mankind in general." 2 It is probably not important that Taney found peace more natural to mankind than war and that the decision, arrived at by methods not disclosed, was consistent with his argument. What is important is the fact that virtually at the beginning of his college career he was challenged by the necessity of thinking as deeply as possible and talking as fluently as possible about certain fundamental characteristics of human beings everywhere. Other topics of debate, selected almost at random from the list, demonstrate similar challenges to youthful minds:

Whether is a good name and the esteem of our acquaintances preferable to a large estate.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The Minute Books of the Belles Lettres Literary Society are preserved in the Dickinson College Library.

#### ROGER B. TANEY

Does the reading of good books or the conversation with the learned tend most to the improvement of our understanding.

Whether have the clergy or women the greatest influence over the morals of mankind? viz. to the improvement of them.

On this question it is reported that Taney was appointed to the side of the women, but that the clergy won.

Whether the desire of fame or the consciousness of doing good, excite men most to the undertaking of great actions.

Whether should the desire of fame be encouraged in young men.

Whether does a limited monarchy or a republican government afford the most sources of happiness.

Ought republican governments to encourage the manufacture of luxuries.

Whether is the life of a hermit or that of a public person most favorable to virtue.

Are not all our actions performed with a view to self interest. Riches is the truest way to happiness.

Certain other topics bore a more immediate relation to the life of the times, as, for example,

Should the British debts be paid under the present circumstances.

Whether the war now carrying on against the Indians is just or not.

Ought a standing army to be kept up in a free country in time of peace.

Were the French justified in beheading Louis XVI.

Whether it would be prudent for America under her present circumstances to declare war with Great Britain under hers.

Is it consistent with the interests and dignity of a republic to admit foreigners to executive or legislative offices.

Negro slavery ought to be abolished.

On this question it is recorded that Taney upheld the negative and that his side lost.

Congress ought to pass a law prohibiting any subject of the United States from holding more than 10,000 acres of land.

Certain other topics reflect variously the interest of students in affairs within the College itself and in less academic preoccupations of young people. One wonders how it was that in a tightly knit little college of this kind students had the temerity to debate

Whether are Dr. Davidson's lectures on Natural philosophy an eligible way of acquiring a knowledge of that science?

On this point it is reported that, with Taney presiding, "The dispute was maintained with ability on both sides, but it was at length determined by a large majority in the negative." A measure of humor was undoubtedly involved in the following:

Whether do the puerile palpitations and fluttering fondnesses of boys and girls generally prevent the exercise of pure and generous passion.

And again,

Men ought to marry when they feel the first effects of love.

This range of debating topics, from the sublime through the practical to the humorous, with emphasis on the sublime, illustrates the breadth and depth of problems to which Taney and his fellow students of the 1790's gave attention. It indicates the incentive to intellectual and moral growth which Dickinson provided to those students of the early period who came close to being among its charter alumni. Taney's experience in his literary society was deeply grooved in his memory. More than a third of a century after his graduation he responded warmly to the society's congratulations on his appointment as Attorney-General of the United States in a letter still in the files of the society which reads in part as follows:

I feel sensibly this token of regard from the members of a Society which I have always held in affectionate remembrance. Many years have indeed passed since I stood in the relation of an active member. But I have never ceased to consider myself interested in the fortunes of the Society, and have always claimed the privilege of sharing in the reputation it has justly maintained. From time to time I have learned with emotions of pleasure its continued existence and highly honorable career, and rejoice frequently to meet in the business of life gentlemen who had been trained and disciplined in its exercises and whose conduct and acquirements reflect credit upon it. Your letter has again brought freshly to my recollection the early friends with whom I was associated, their mutual kindness, their generous imulation. And when you gentlemen shall have advanced in years, and long mixed in the labours and cares of maturer life, you will be more sensible than any language of mine could now make you of the sincere pleasure your letter has given me,

and how gratifying it is to find that I am still remembered in the Society, and thought worthy of this distinguished mark of its approbation.<sup>3</sup>

It may be worthy of note also that at some time after his achievement of prominence at the bar and in his office he made to the society a contribution of twenty dollars, which, in terms of the salaries, fees and prices of those days was a considerable amount indeed. When some years later, however, at the time of his appointment as Chief Justice, he was asked for another contribution he replied politely but firmly that "I hope you will think with me that this contribution was as large as the Society would expect from one of its members after he had left college." <sup>4</sup>

Much can be said in praise of the contribution which Dickinson College made to the education of Roger Taney. It took an immature boy from a southern Maryland plantation who had little familiarity with books and the disciplined discussion of fundamental ideas and saturated him with as much cultural richness as he could be induced to absorb. It provided a forum for youthful wrestling with ideas, to the end that ideas and facts were worked into student minds instead of accumulating as undigested masses of material to be sloughed off and forgotten upon departure from college halls. Too much, however, must not be said for the immediate achievement. There is no reason for believing that between the years of 1792 and 1795 young Taney became brilliantly independent in his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Taney to the Belles Lettres Literary Society, Washington, Aug. 23, 1831, B. L. S. Letters, 1812-1839, 92, Dickinson College Library.

thinking. He himself records the fact that when his fellow students elected him valedictorian of his class he went to Dr. Nisbet for assignment of the topic of his speech and for an outline on which to write it. The subject of the utility of seminaries of learning, which Dr. Nisbet assigned, hardly seems one on which a boy of eighteen would be able to expound with assurance and perspective. Its selection, rather, suggests the probability that the valedictorian served but as the mouthpiece of the head of the College, for the expression of ideas on some of which Dr. Nisbet differed sharply with his board of trustees.

There is no evidence of unwillingness on Taney's part to accept from the head of the College dictation of basic structure of his formal address. He may have been ready at this stage in his life to think with his favorite teacher against the trustees and the rest of the world but he was evidently not yet ready to announce and defend convictions of his own. It remained for the experiences of later years to school in him the independence which at times required him on behalf of his convictions to incur bitter denunciation, to part company with loyal friends, and even to counsel as the lesser of two evils the dissolution of the Union to which throughout his life he had been deeply devoted and which he had been sworn to uphold.

It may, indeed, have been lack of personal conviction about the content of his valedictory speech which left him completely vulnerable to agonizing stage fright as he faced his commencement audience. Says his account,

I was sadly frightened, and trembled in every limb, and my voice was husky and unmanageable. I was sensible of all this,

much mortified by it; and my feeling of mortification made matters worse. Fortunately, my speech had been so well committed to memory, that I went through without the aid of the prompter. But the pathos of leavetaking from the professors and my classmates, which had been so carefully worked out in the written oration, was, I doubt not, spoiled by the embarrassment under which it was delivered.

In this account he throws light an another facet of his education. He remembered his valedictory speech throughout his life for the ordeal that it was. The fact that the honor fell to him was little known and never considered important outside the College community. Even so, the distinction was greatly prized. He wrote concerning it more than half a century later,

In the little world of a college, it is as much valued, and as much the object of ambition, as the high offices of government in the great political world. And I confess that I would, at that time, have endured much more than I did rather than not have obtained it. Such is ambition in the little world and the great, and so early do our teachers and instructors plant it in our hearts. I do not say that it is wrong. For when it is properly regulated, and directed to proper objects, it often leads the possessor to great personal sacrifices for the benefit of others. But I doubt whether it promotes often his own happiness, however successful he may be.<sup>5</sup>

If man's education begins generations before he is born, it continues long after completion of his college career.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Samuel Tyler, Memoir of Roger Brooke Taney, LL.D. (Baltimore, 1872) 46ff; Carl B. Swisher, Roger B. Taney (New York, 1935) 16ff.

After graduation Taney returned to his father's home to spend a winter among the fox-hunting planters of southern Maryland. Then he departed for Annapolis, to read law in the office of a local judge and prepare himself for admission to the bar. Initially at least, the study of law for him, as for most fledgling lawyers, was not primarily the study of great ideas and principles of jurisprudence. It was the study of tools, mechanisms, and techniques for winning cases and keeping clients out of legal difficulties. It was learning to match wits with other lawyers in the mapping of legal strategy and in performance in the tense atmosphere of the courtroom. In the exercise of such skills Taney found his college training in debate highly relevant. Relevant also was the ability to voice the ideas of other men as distinguished from his own, although in this field Taney seems to have found that his range was definitely limited. He never developed into the kind of lawyer who could with rolling periods utilize in his court room performances the great works of oratory, drama and poetry of all time. Neither did he whip up his own emotions for desk-pounding, tub-thumping performances without reference to the merits of his own case. His speaking technique, rather, was that of simple and direct and very earnest statement of his case as he saw it, with a clarity or appearance of clarity which brought a feeling of relief to the mind of the hitherto puzzled auditor. In other words he had to make the subject matter completely his own and to comb out all that was extraneous to his own ideas and his own method of expression if he was to sub-

stitute effectiveness for a show of artificiality such as he had demonstrated in his valedictory oration.

The technique of simple, direct and starkly clear expression came to characterize all Taney's writing as well as his oral presentations. It marks the character of his written opinions as a lawyer, as attorney-general, and as judge, and the letters which he wrote to his friends.

The school of experience had other lessons for Taney than the lesson that he must find his own convictions and express them in his own way if he was to win decisions from courts or from the public. He learned that to have convictions of one's own was sometimes to separate one's self from one's class and one's neighbors and one's friends. He was brought up as a Federalist and as a member of the propertied aristocracy of his part of the country. Yet as he entered upon the practice of law and did service as a member of the Maryland legislature he grew increasingly discontented with the ultra-conservatism of his party and his class. When the Federalists split over the issues of the War of 1812 he as a prominent young lawyer and politician in Frederick took the locally unpopular side, thereby shattering valuable friendships of long standing. The party rift eventually disappeared or found concealment but so also did the party itself disappear. Taney was left as a man without a party but with a reputation for integrity and independence. When voters began to reorganize along new lines and under new leaders, Taney found himself at the head of those Marylanders who in 1828 supported Andrew Jackson for the presidency.

It was a long way from the Federalism of Washington

to the Democracy of Jackson. Parties and issues and even much of the language of politics had been transformed. In one important respect Taney, the descendant of a long line of planters whose tobacco plantations had been worked by Negroes, remained largely unchanged. He regarded the black population as simple people whose lives must be supervised and watched over by responsible white men. He freed his own slaves, perhaps partly out of humanitarianism and partly because they had little place in the life of a lawyer devoted exclusively to the practice of law and politics, but he continued to provide for them financially and to aid in the solution of their problems. He knew too much of slaves at first hand to believe that either their interests or those of the community would be served by setting them free and leaving them to shift for themselves. He had no sympathy, therefore, for the evangelical abolition movement which was then getting under way.

The developing issues between the owners and managers of liquid capital on the one hand and debtor groups and the people generally on the other, involved fewer convictions growing out of a family heritage and more creative thinking about fairness and justice amid the conditions of a new order. Taney had a deep devotion to justice as justice was seen through his own eyes. He shared Jackson's distrust of what both called the "moneyed aristocracy." Involvement of the Bank of the United States in political warfare with the Jackson administration was enough to convince both of them that the aggregation of power represented by the federally chartered but largely privately controlled national bank was a menace to the gov-

ernment and to the national welfare. It was in the midst of the bitter struggle with the bank that Taney, first as Attorney-General and then as Secretary of the Treasury, worked out his philosophy with respect to the relations of government to such aggregations of power. Once again he faced the bitterness involved in seeing friendships turn into enmities. Once again he developed the capacity to stand firm in the face of unprecedented political and professional pressure. He was not, as Daniel Webster called him, the "pliant instrument" of Andrew Jackson. As both he and Jackson saw it, he was a participant under Jackson's leadership in a crusade on behalf of the liberities of the American people, a crusade against predatory interests, interests which had derived support and sustenance from the government itself.

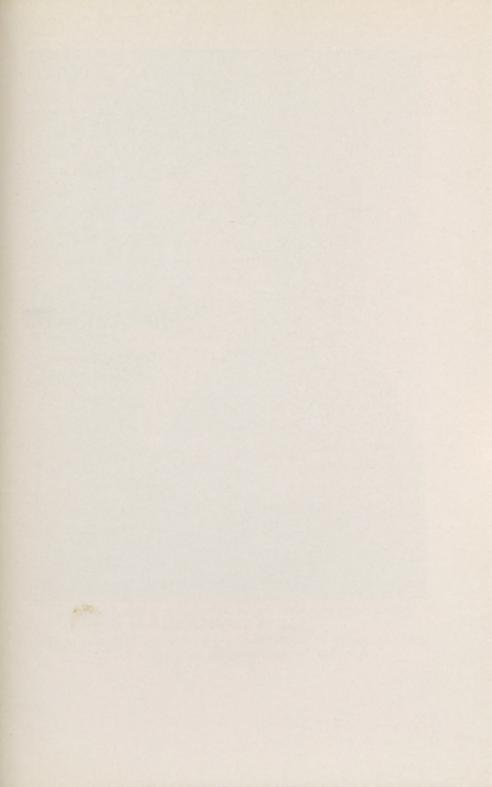
It was undoubtedly Taney's local service to the Jackson administration in the war with the Bank of the United States that brought his appointment as Chief Justice as successor to John Marshall, after an angry Senate, largely friendly to the bank, had rejected an earlier nomination for a position as associate justice. The appointment was not merely, however, a reward for personal service to the President. Rather, it marked recognition of the fact that Taney was ready to fight for the principles of high statesmanship which at its superior levels animated what has come to be called Jacksonian Democracy. The theme of American national life was changing. Under the leadership of Chief Justice Marshall the supremacy of the federal government had been written into constitutional law and upheld in practice. The time had now come for more care-

ful delineation of the powers left to the states and of the rights of individuals within our federated society. Many of the opinions of the Supreme Court during Taney's twenty-eight years as Chief Justice have abiding significance for their contribution to the development of federalism in the United States and for their definition of the place of man and property in relation to government.

This is not the occasion, however, for comprehensive appraisal of Taney's judicial leadership and of his contribution to constitutional law. Our concern here is primarily with his education rather than specifically with his performance. Certain it is that the varied streams of influence which had played upon him during the prejudicial fifty-nine years of his life continued in large part to mold his conduct thereafter. He remained to a considerable extent the son of a southern planter with a planter's outlook upon rights of property and human relations. He operated in terms of the growth and of the ambition for which his College could claim credit. He exercised the vision of a man who had learned to think for himself and the independence of a man who had learned that at times he must stand alone even at the expense of the loss of valued friendships.

It may be wondered, it is true, whether toward the end of his life the pattern of his education did not to some extent play him false as he lost flexibility to adapt to crises in the life of his country. Youth has often been warned to "be careful what you want when you are young, lest you get too much of it when you are old." For almost all of us it is true that rigidities come with the pass-

ing years. In the light of the richness of his training and the flexibility of thought and action which he demonstrated during much of his life, it might have been hoped that he would have been able to deal more constructively than he did with the issues of the case of Dred Scott. It might have been hoped that he would play an effective part in holding together the nation which was being torn asunder. His capacity for successful adaptation to new conditions, however, and for intellectual leadership of a people who must live in the present and future rather than in the past had dissipated with the passing years. He could write a brilliant defense of constitutional liberties in the Merryman case, but he was no longer able to relate his principles directly to the task of saving the Union and promoting the public welfare. All this, however, we must not hold too much against him. The eighty years of his life which antedated the Dred Scott decision and the Civil War demonstrated the faithful utilization of the capacities and opportunities which he had inherited and the education which had been provided by his family, his College, and life in general. More than this we have little right to ask of any man.





JAMES BUCHANAN
From the original by James Eicholtz in the National Collection of Fine
Arts, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

## James Buchanan: Lessons in Leadership in Trying Times \*



Roy F. Nichols

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UNIVERSITY OF PENNYSLVANIA

One hundred and fifty-seven years ago today in a farm-house at the crest of a mountain cove road in the Pennsylvania Appalachians was born a boy who was to fulfil the destiny anticipated for so many American youth. He was to become President of the United States.

It is appropriate that his Alma Mater should devote a portion of her anniversary celebration to do him honor, particularly as this is a year of presidential election. In these tense times, when leadership is so essential to the continuing success of democracy, it is also appropriate to use this birthday remembrance of a President to consider some of the characteristics of American leadership as illustrated by the career of James Buchanan, Dickinson, 1809.

The lad born in this mountain gap had a substantial inheritance. His father was a shrewd Scotch-Irish immigrant who prospered as a frontier trader. His mother,

<sup>\*</sup> Address delivered at Dickinson College, April 23, 1948, during the celebration of the 175th anniversary of its founding.

of the same racial stock, was a vigorous woman of the frontier who was blessed with an active and romantic imagination. Somehow she found time to read, particularly poetry; she stored her memory with it and shared it with her son. She and her husband were sincere and devout Presbyterians and enriched their conversation and their correspondence with constant reference to the Scriptures. This was a heritage of which any American boy could be proud and James Buchanan was ever grateful for the character and strength of his parents.

As a Presbyterian he was in due course naturally sent to the then Presbyterian Dickinson. He arrived in Carlisle a serious-minded youth prepared to make the most of his educational opportunity. However, the College had just lost a President and was not happy in its temporary leadership. Discipline suffered during the interval and the youngster from the West found himself in the midst of a restive student body. He was not naturally boisterous, yet he was always governed by a certain timidity which prevented him from resisting current trends. Rather than seem queer, he determined to do as the others did. The result, as is not unusual in such cases, was that he overdid it. He was caught in some prank and expelled. However, through the intercession of his pastor he was reinstated. He applied himself as he had promised his clergyman he would, but because of the blot on his record the faculty did not feel that he should graduate with the honor that he had otherwise won. This experience, as his father indicated in an admonitory letter, taught him something:

## JAMES BUCHANAN

I hope you will have fortitude enough to surmount these things. Your great consolation is in yourself, and if you can say your right was taken from you by a partial spirit and given to those to whom it ought not to be given, you must for the present submit. The more you know of mankind, the more you will distrust them. It is said the knowledge of mankind and the distrust of them are reciprocally connected.<sup>1</sup>

He turned to the study of law under a precepter in Lancaster in a mood which he graphically described:

I determined that if severe application would make me a good lawyer, I should not fail in this particular; and I can say, with truth, that I have never known a harder student than I was at that period of my life. I studied law, and nothing but law, or what was essentially connected with it. I took pains to understand thoroughly, as far as I was capable, everything which I read; and in order to fix it upon my memory and give myself the habit of extempore speaking, I almost every evening took a lonely walk, and embodied the ideas I had acquired during the day in my own language. This gave me a habit of extempore speaking, and that not merely words but things. I derived great improvement from this practice.<sup>2</sup>

His earnest endeavors were rewarded by success at the bar and he made money. He was encouraged to enter politics under the patronage of his elders and was elected to the legislature. He aspired to marry the daughter of a wealthy coal baron but the match was broken off by her

2 Ibid., 7.

George T. Curtis, Life of James Buchanan (New York, 1883) I, 6.

## BULWARK OF LIBERTY

family. Buchanan felt that in this he had lost face and attributed it in part to his lack of more important connections. He sought to compensate for this great blow to his self-esteem by returning to politics. He would secure friends and gain such prestige that he would be immune from such slights thereafter. He entered Congress at the age of thirty and spent the next forty years in constant political activity. He was in public office during all but five of those years.

He entered the arena of Pennsylvania politics to find it suited to his talents. The state had always played a peculiar role in politics. Its leadership had been equally peculiar. Even at this early day the politicians were showing their characteristic temper. As the authority on this period describes it: "They would repose confidence nowhere but in mediocrity. A man of signal ability, strong of spirit and independent in thought, might too easily become the spearhead of a new faction if placed in a position of power." 3 It was an atmosphere which discouraged leadership. As one contemporary put it:

It will be, if it is not now the case, the general opinion awhile that we have no great men in Pennsylvania-that our soil is more congenial to wheat than talents. There was a period long ago when we had our great men, and we showed them, and rewarded their holy ambition, but that time is past.

> Shrine of the mighty! Can it be That this is all remains of thee? 4

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup> Philip S. Klein, Pennsylvania Politics, 1817-1832: A Game without Rules (Philadelphia, 1940) 192.

At first Buchanan resented Pennsylvania's lack of influence. In the winter of 1824-1825 while Congress was preparing to elect the President, Buchanan was trying to make Pennsylvania's weight felt by negotiating with Jackson and Clay. However his efforts were rather clumsy and he was "caught out." This episode, like his disgrace at Dickinson and his broken engagement, scarred him deeply and taught him another lesson in caution and propriety. Hereafter he was more than ever marked by the coloring of his state. He was dealing with a complex commonwealth with many interests and many leaders, most of them suspicious of too great talent. He would hereafter eschew boldness and enterprise. He would take refuge in an appearance of mediocrity which he began to cultivate.

Henceforth he specialized in long, routine speeches, trite, and carefully freed from any ideas. He cultivated a wide correspondence to which he contributed countless neat but utterly commonplace letters to hundreds of his constituents. In the halls of Congress he became known for his caution and his growing expertness at intrigue and craft. Externally his height and stout build, his deficient sense of humor, his prematurely white hair, all combined to lend him an austere dignity which made him a figure to be noticed. Furthermore he proved attractive to women, and being singularly immune from any serious purpose as far as they were concerned, he found it advantageous to develop the arts of mild flirtation as a further item of prestige value.

Budding Vice-Presidential ambitions made him a rival of Van Buren and probably placed him under Jackson's

ban. He was literally banished to Russia as Minister just before the campaign of 1832. Abroad he cultivated foreign diplomatic acquaintance and returned even more a man of the world, but still sufficiently cautious and commonplace to appeal to Pennsylvania's peculiar needs for mediocrity. He was promoted to the Senate.

His formula had brought him to the Capitol again and he began to think of the White House. In the same way he continued to build up support. He cultivated the right people, he carefully refrained from anything but commonplace expression, and he continued an ever extended correspondence now despatched to all sections of the country. He was a laborious senator but no legislation of importance bore his name, nor did he formulate or shape any policies. But he became better and better known among the Pennsylvania politicians and the leaders in other states.

A new system of political action was developing from which Buchanan was peculiarly fitted to gain advantage. During the thirties, parties organized and a system of negotiated nominations developed. Presidential candidates were now chosen by national conventions of the newly spawning machine leaders. Great statesmen like Webster, Clay and Calhoun might dazzle crowds but they could seldom persuade conventions of jealous lesser men who, like the Pennsylvanians, were more comfortable in the presence of mediocrity.

Buchanan had learned to cultivate such people. He avoided crowds and gallery appeals, he devoted himself to gaining a greater acquaintance with those who made nomi-

nations. He succeeded in securing his own state and went to the National Convention in 1844 as her choice. As she had twenty-seven electoral votes this was no mean advantage. At that meeting a revolution took place. The "little men" took over. They cast off the influence of the Jackson-Van Buren order and chose a lesser light, James Knox Polk, as their nominee. Polk knew his obligations and met them. Buchanan became Secretary of State.

By this time, whatever there was left of the man of action which Buchanan might have become had largely disappeared. As Polk discovered, Buchanan "is an able man but is in small matters without judgment and sometimes acts like an old maid." <sup>5</sup> But ambition burned brightly. He applied his talents to diplomacy in foreign affairs and domestic politics and served successfully as Secretary of State, and after an interval, as Minister to Great Britain. In 1852 he tried again unsuccessfully to secure the Presidential nomination but it was not until 1856 that his chance came.

The election year of 1856 was marked by a grave concern over leadership. The White House had been occupied for four years by Franklin Pierce, who had failed to command events, and politics was getting out of hand. Worse, national security and integrity were threatened and the specter of disruption again appeared. New leadership was needed. Many turned to Buchanan as the experienced public functionary, man of affairs, diplomat, man of the world, quite a contrast to the *ingenue* Pierce. Among the inner circle of those who make nominations, "Old Buck"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> James K. Polk, Diary (M. M. Quaife, ed., 4v., Chicago, 1910) IV, 355.

had powerful friends who emphasized his role of the expert. Their interest in him, however, arose from another cause. They knew Buchanan's real character and the nature of the leadership which he could provide.

His real quality was illustrated to me quite aptly by an election sermon I once heard. In 1930 I was in Germany during the election campaign in which Hitler and his Nazis made their first appreciable showing. On election Sunday I went to the Cathedral and there the clergyman preached on this question of leadership. He used as his text, "For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power" (I Corinthians 4:20). He urged the choice of leaders who were men of power rather than of words.

This distinction is most appropriate in Buchanan's case for he was a man of words rather than of power. His inspiring presence, his experience, gave an appearance of power which was not justified by his performance. He was a man of words not because he was a demagogue or spellbinder; he was rather one of the "scribes." He could write a lawyer's brief, a diplomat's despatch, a politician's argument. He could make a conciliatory speech and write an ingratiating political letter. He could weigh credentials and try to apportion patronage by formula. He trusted in words, in formulae, in treaties and arrangements.

He opposed evil but he derived no power from faith in his capacity to overcome it. He would try to exorcise it with words but he would not fight it. Instead of searching for power in time of crisis, instead of commanding it, he contented himself with announcing his lack of it, one suspects with an inward sense of relief, and passing on the responsibility to others.

Real leadership, however, depends upon power, and power springs from faith and enthusiasm for a cause, a system or way of life. There has always been a fundamental belief held widely among the American people, though sometimes obscured, that their way of life is in some respects like unto the Kingdom of God on earth. Our strongest leadership has been that which spoke in terms of righteousness and worked ceaselessly to preserve, protect and defend it. Buchanan, however, was only able to argue for it.

Why he did not possess the power of such leadership can probably never be explained. Why some men have these gifts and others do not are lost in the mysteries of the forces determining human personality. But to those who knew him best in politics, to those who put him in the highest place in the land, the fact that he did not have that power was known. They put him there because he did not have it. They wanted a man who would not take initiative, who was timid, who would take refuge in words, who would not interfere with their control.

He was a most unfortunate choice, as all now well know. He did not rise to the occasion and when each new disaster came upon him or as each new crisis threatened, he retired to his study to find a formula, to write a paper, to construct an argument. These documents were no more effective than the paper on which they were written would have been in stemming a flood.

Today, in 1948, the lesson in leadership is still before us

to be learned. We desperately need real leadership in time of trouble. We should say, in a paraphrase of the words of the Berlin clergyman, "God protect the American people, as they go to the polls, from wordmongers. May He send us men from His kingdom, men of power." For there is great need of a man of power, of power arising from faith in the righteousness which is the American Way of Life. The American people should be satisfied with none other.

Dickinson College has had a long and honored history in training men for such leadership. Many have undoubtedly gone from these halls filled with the zeal for the American Way of Life which has given them the power

necessary for true leadership.

But it is becoming increasingly difficult to hand on this torch of faith. There are too many quenching elements: cynicism, doubt and despair. We must turn more often to the faith-refreshing lessons of history—we must study more intensively the history of faith, and of the power rising from faith. We must transmit it to the youth who gather around us, really thirsty for this water from the river of life. This, then, is the educational challenge of the trying hours of this hollow mockery of peace. We must not fail.

